



# DANIEL

## 7 LESSONS FROM BABYLON

A COMPANION BIBLE STUDY FOR  
OF FIRE AND LIONS

BY

SHAWNA DUVALL

## Table of Contents

Introduction

Lesson One                      Idols, Idols Everywhere  
*God is the one, true God*

Lesson Two                     God in a Box  
*God dwells with His people*

Lesson Three                  I Am, and There Is None Besides Me  
*God loves a humble heart*

Lesson Four                   How Long, O Lord?  
*God is trustworthy*

Lesson Five                    Evidences of Mercy  
*God is merciful*

Lesson Six                      Walking in the Light  
*God is truth and light*

Lesson Seven                  Courage in the Face of Fire and Lions  
*God is in control*

## Daniel: 7 Lessons from Babylon

### Introduction

Dear reader, I'm so glad you've decided to take a step further in your full experience of *Of Fire and Lions*. In these seven lessons, we will uncover some of the underlying themes of this beautiful story. Themes of hope, devotion, forgiveness, and living with courageous faith. Mesu Andrews' careful Biblical study and powerful storytelling provides us with such a rich, colorful tale based on true historical events.

Each lesson in this study has three parts that build on one another. In part one the focus is on Yahweh. We'll ask questions like, "Who is God?" and "What do I believe about God?". Then, in part two we'll take what we've studied and turn our gaze to the cross. *Of Fire and Lions* is ultimately a story pointing to the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Together we'll discover how the ancient Biblical story of Daniel has much to reveal about the glorious Gospel message for us today. Finally, in part three, we'll pause to reflect on what God might be personally speaking to us through His Word. We'll allow space for the Spirit to move and work in our hearts and prayerfully apply the truths He has shown us.

It will be an in-depth and unforgettable journey learning the same awesome truths our spiritual ancestors did in their extended stay in Babylon. So, will you join me? Are you ready to pick up your shovel and get your knees a little dirty as we dig through the Scriptures together? Perhaps grab a friend or two or gather with a small group in your local church. I know God will bless your time and effort!

Above all, as we embark on this journey together, my prayer is for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to open the eyes of our hearts...that we may know the power and hope of the Gospel and be overwhelmed by the riches of his love and grace towards us in Christ Jesus!

## Lesson One

### Idols, Idols, Everywhere

Ancient Babylon was characterized by many things...wealth, power, strength, sensuality, self-indulgence... the list goes on. Yet predominant even over all of these was her devotion to idol worship. Temples. Festivals. Sacrifices. Prayers. Oaths. Idolatry heavily flavored almost every historical remnant of Babylonian culture.

As we read *Of Fire and Lions*, our first encounter with idol worship happens before the five young captives even step foot into Babylon's gates. In the captive encampment, Abigail asks Ashpenaz about the creature-like golden image positioned outside every tent. Bowing in reverence to the idol, he says it is Sarrush, the earthly representation of the Babylonian god Marduk.<sup>i</sup>

Forty days later, upon arriving in Babylon, the five young captives come face to face with the late King Nabopolassar's reconstructed Tower of Babel. Abigail is assigned to the Esagila temple to eventually serve as a priestess to the god, Marduk. And the Judean princes are given new names by Ashpenaz honoring the Babylonian gods of Bel, Aku and Nebo.<sup>ii</sup>

As the story progresses, we see idolatry continually at odds with the Judean captives while they seek to remain faithful to Yahweh alone. To stay alive Belili bows to the Median god of oaths and even becomes high priestess. Nebuchadnezzar commands the officials of all provinces to worship his golden statue, which costs Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael a trip to the fiery furnace. Daniel faces the den of lions in his old age because he refuses to pray to Darius alone. Idols, idols everywhere.

With over 2000 years time between us and them, we might be tempted to think all that's in the ancient past. That we don't really have to worry about idols today. But maybe idols aren't just lumps of wood or gold or stone. I've heard Mesu define an idol as, "anything we rely on *more than* God—or *in place of* God."

For the duration of this lesson we will spend time focusing on what Scripture says about idolatry and how it relates to the people of God—then and now. My prayer is that we'll have a renewed faith in Yahweh as the one true God and commit more passionately to follow Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

### Part One | Who is Yahweh?

#### ***Yahweh is the One True God***

In considering what the Bible says about God being the one, true God, the best place to start is at the beginning. Turn in your Bible to Genesis 1:1-2.

Who is present at creation?

Who is doing the creating?

Is there any other god or created being also present and active in creating the world?

Before the creation of the world, God existed. He alone brought forth all of creation from Himself. When anyone worships anything created *by God*, instead of God, that is idolatry. Romans 1:25 says it this way, "...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!"<sup>iii</sup>

Now let's take this a step further. Skip ahead to the next book of the Bible, Exodus, where we read how God revealed himself as the one, true God to His chosen people. Exodus 1 describes how His people, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had become bitterly enslaved in the land of Egypt under Pharaoh's harsh rule and reign. God saw them in their bondage and heard their cries. With a heart of tender mercy and faithful love, He sent Moses to deliver His people up and out of slavery and to bring them to Himself.

He did this through a series of mighty acts of judgment, each one showcasing his powerful authority over the false gods of Egypt.

Read Exodus 6:6-7. What does God want His people to know?

Now read Exodus 7:5,17 and 8:10,22. Who else does God want to know that He is the LORD?

Look carefully at Exodus 12:12. Upon whom does God say He will execute judgments in the last plague? What do you think God is declaring about Himself in this statement?

Why do you think it was important for the Hebrew people to know and believe that God is the LORD, the one, true God as they were delivered from bondage and taken into the wilderness? (see Exodus 14:30-31)

In delivering His people out of bondage with powerful and mighty acts of judgment, God proclaimed to the world that He is the One true God and He is *for* His people. It was essential for the Hebrew people to know and believe this about God if they were to follow Him into the promised land and love and worship Him only. He was establishing Himself not only as *their* God, but as the one, *true* God. He knew in the promised land they would be confronted and surrounded by many forms of idol worship. They would need to look back and remember God's unmistakable display of supreme power and authority so when tempted to turn to other gods they may remember to fear, love and serve Him only. He is trustworthy. And He is true.

Scripture has much to say in declaring Yahweh as the one, true God. Look up the following verses and jot down any additional thoughts about who God says He is.

Exodus 20:1-6

Isaiah 44:6-8

Isaiah 46:1-11

How important is it to Him that His people believe He is the one, true God and worship Him only?

Can you explain your answer?

Our final question turns our focus back to our own hearts in response to what we have just studied. What do *you* believe about Yahweh? What does it mean *for you* personally that He is the one, true God?

## Part Two | From Daniel to the Cross

***Jesus came to make a way for us to worship the one, true God.***

The thing about idols is—they're a dead end. Every time. They cannot save. They cannot deliver. Remember Belili's realization in Achmetha?

*"Not that Mithra had saved me. No god had. Nor any man. When Ashpenaz's eunuchs abandoned me on the streets of Achmetha, I realized the folly of faith – in anyone or anything. Trust led to betrayals, and betrayals crushed hope."*<sup>iv</sup>

Idols beckon and entice with their empty promises of security, comfort, prosperity and pleasure. But they disappoint every time, never satisfying the desperate, longing heart. Building on Mesu's definition of an idol (anything we rely on more than God), consider this quote by Tim Keller:

*"What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give."*<sup>v</sup>

Drawing from both definitions above, write out your own idea of what an idol is below:

When we trust (or *rely*) on anything else other than God to give us meaning, fulfillment, satisfaction, or *true life*, we will 100% of the time come up short. Why? Because an idol is an empty shell of a promise. Like following a fake treasure map only to find the "treasure" is a rotten pile of bones, so it is for us when we trust in idols. They possess no power to grant the kind of life we are looking for because apart from God, there is no life, only death and destruction. Sadly, this is how Abigail became buried inside Belili.

Now consider Jesus. The Son of God who came in human form as the full representation of Yahweh to the world. He came to demolish every idolatrous lie that sets itself up against the knowledge of the one,

true God. In His life, death, and resurrection, He declared victory over sin and death, proclaiming that He is the one, true God worthy of our worship. He is *always* faithful and true. We can throw all of our hope (completely rely) on Him and *never* be disappointed. Why? Because He is the treasure map to the greatest treasure on earth—true life in God through Himself.

Look up the following verses to see a few of the reasons we can have such great assurance in Jesus as the one, true God.

John 1:1-4 (note: *The Word* mentioned here is a reference to Jesus Christ)

John 14:6-11

1 Cor 8:4

Phil 2:5-10

Col 1:15-20

We studied earlier how it was important for the Hebrew people to know and believe God was the one, true God before following Him into the wilderness and then into the promised land. Why is it equally important for us to believe Jesus is the one, true God as we live out our faith in a broken world?

Dear one, in our bondage to sin, shame, fear, and even death, no idol has ever or will ever have the power to deliver us. But there is One who alone breaks those chains. He is Christ Jesus, the one, true God, resurrected from the grave and now exalted to the right hand of the Father (Rom 8:34).

Unlike any idol or false god, Jesus left heaven and came to earth to serve and give His life *to make a way* for all people to come and worship the one, true God. Remember the false treasure map? Jesus Christ is both the true map *and* the true treasure! He loves us so much He willingly came to show us the way when we were helpless, lost and desperately searching for abundant life, or how we might *really and truly live* (John 10:10b). He came that we might follow Him as the Way, and find above all else (all other idols and false gods) that He alone is the treasure we've been searching for.

Friend, I ask you...what idol has ever given its life for you? What false god has ever chosen to lay aside its glory because of its love for another? What idol has ever satisfied your soul and helped you *truly live*? I know of none.

Jesus was born into a world that was filled with false gods and false gospels and declared He was the Way, the Truth and the Life for all of humanity (John 14:6). When we trust and rely on Him as the way, we'll also find the treasure of His life and love are more than anything we could ever ask for or imagine!

What do these verses say about the treasure of eternal life we find in Christ Jesus?

John 3:16

John 17:3

1 John 4:9

As we wrap up this section, write out what you believe about Jesus as the one, true, Son of God in the space below.

Look back at our definition of an idol. How might your belief in Jesus as the one, true, Son of God change the way you think about idols?

Write out what it means to you personally that Jesus is both the treasure map *and* the greatest treasure.

### **Part 3 | In my life...**

***“You shall worship the LORD your God and him only shall you serve.” Matt 4:10***

When I think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow in the plain of Dura...or Daniel publicly praying the Shema in front a band of malicious accusers...I shudder to think of what I might have done in their situations. Would I allow my fears to get the better of me? Would I bow to men’s threats, or would I stay true to my God...the one, *true* God?

My thoughts turn to Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. He had spent forty days in the desert with no food. He was hungry. Weak. And along comes Satan. Jesus, the Son of God, is faced with temptations from the enemy beyond what you or I will ever know or understand. In his final attempt, Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and all their glory...if...He will only fall down and worship him. (Sound familiar? Cue the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and Neb’s shiny golden image.) Jesus’s response echoes that of our three young Hebrew heroes, and yet He speaks with the authority of God in heaven and commands the enemy to flee.

*“Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”* (Matt 4:10).

While this text is certainly declaring Jesus’ dominion over darkness and evil, we also have here a strong example to follow when confronting idols in our lives. Despite His physical weakness, Jesus remains sharply aware that Satan’s claim of being a god worthy of worship is false. He then, with great resolve, demolishes any temptation to commit idolatry by proclaiming Scripture about the one, true God.

Let’s do a little heart work and see how we might apply Christ’s example to our own lives.

### **Identifying the Idols in our Life**

In Babylon, the idol worship was obvious. Temples scattered the city. Images of gods were printed and sculpted on every structure. Today, the snare of false gods might not be as clearly defined. Tim Keller says it this way,



“A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living...an idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.’ There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship*.”<sup>vi</sup>

So, idols don’t necessarily have to be something we can see or touch. They may be, in fact, even things that are good. Family, friends, career, relationships, intellect, physicality, beauty, dreams and aspirations, comfort, and security. In the novel there is evidence of idolatry other than in the worship of Marduk and Mithra. Think back on the characters in the story. Based on Keller’s quote above, do any other forms of idol worship come to mind, either in the novel or in our culture today?

How about your own life? Can you identify and name any idols or false gods that receive your worship?

How might you follow Christ’s example in Matt 4:1-11 in confronting these counterfeit gods in your life?

Like Belili, many of us have been influenced and even enslaved by the worship of false gods in our life for years. But Christ came to set us free. When we confess and repent in our hearts of our sin of idolatry and turn to worship Him as our one, true God and the Lord of our lives, we will find forgiveness, love, and grace. His presence and power in us give us the strength to renounce false gods and offers us hope and freedom to follow and serve Him only.

### **With all our heart, soul, mind, and strength**

God is serious about idolatry because as the one, true God He knows He alone is the source of life and true fulfillment for all people. It’s not just that idol worship robs God of the praise and glory due His name, it’s that at its core, idolatry is the pathway to death and destruction for the children He loves so dearly.

But the prophet Jeremiah was right when he said, “The heart is deceitful above all things...Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9).

When God delivered His people out of Egypt and led them to the promised land, He warned them about the consequences of idolatry. But He knew—even though they experienced good gifts from His hand (victory over armies, fertile land, abundant harvest, peace and security)—they would choose to give their hearts away to other gods. They would forget His covenant love for them and His protective instructions on how to live, and they would worship false gods. For generations, He warned His people through the prophets that idolatry would lead to despair, destruction, and exile.

And it did. Daniel and his friends tread the grapes of wrath for God’s people.

A famous quote by John Calvin infers the human mind is a perpetual factory for idols.<sup>vii</sup> In our broken humanity, we all worship something or someone other than the one, true God. Constantly scanning the horizon for the next thing to satisfy and chasing after winds of false promise, we rely on lesser gods and

bow our hearts to idol after idol. But God wants our whole heart. He wants all of us—mind, body, and soul.

God longs for us to follow him *wholeheartedly*. He has given us the fullness of Himself in Christ. And He wants *all of you* and *all of me* in return.

Why do you think our hearts are prone to half-hearted worship? What do you think draws us to give part of our worship to counterfeit gods?

Let's end our time in this lesson reflecting on Deuteronomy 6. Go ahead and read the whole chapter, focusing on verses 4-6. As you read, write a few of your observations below.

In *Of Fire and Lions*, Daniel recites and prays the Hebrew *Shema* to begin his prayers. It is found in Deut. 6:4-5 and is considered the unified response of the people to their belief that Yahweh alone is God, and is *their* God. Even today, the Shema is the center of the Jewish people's daily prayers, and as Christ followers, it is our greatest commandment.

When Israel proclaimed the Shema, they were proclaiming He alone is the one, true God and thus the only God worthy of their wholehearted devotion to Him.

Write out the *Shema* below (Deut 6:4-5).

Notice this is the same command Jesus has given us, as His followers. Write out Matt 22:37-38 below.

On a scale of 1-10, how much of your heart do you feel you have offered up to God (if 1 is very little and 10 is completely)? Why did you choose this number?

Take this opportunity to write out in your own words a prayer of response to God using the Shema and Matt 22:37-38 as your framework.

The Gospel says Jesus sacrificed his own life for us that we may be free to find our lives in Him. Because He is the one, true God, when we place *all* of our hope and trust in Him, we will never be disappointed. When we love and worship Christ with our *whole* heart and soul, it is then we find true and abundant life in Him.

Beloved, in Christ you are held tight in the faithful and steadfast love of the one, true God! Worship Him with your whole heart. *There is no one like our God!*

## Lesson Two

### *God in a Box*

#### Part 1 | Who is Yahweh?

##### *God dwells with His people*

I think every one of us can pinpoint a time in our life when we felt all alone. Maybe a time when we felt forgotten and abandoned like Abigail cast into the service of Mithra. Or perhaps like Daniel appointed to the Babylonian King's court, surrounded by people, but God seemed a million miles away. Maybe you can relate.

In this lesson we will focus on the presence of God. *Is He really here with me, even right now in this moment? Or am I ever as alone as I sometimes feel?*

My prayer as we walk through this lesson together, is for our hearts to be comforted and stilled in knowing God is closer than our very breath. And not only is He right here *with you* (and with me) in this moment...His desire is to have you *with Him*, both now and forever.

##### **God's presence with His people**

One of my favorite scenes in *Of Fire and Lions* is when nine-year-old Abigail seeks refuge in the Holy of Holies. Desperate to find safety from the Babylonian army of invaders upon Jerusalem, she does the unthinkable and sets foot in the inner chamber of the Temple, the sanctuary of the Ark of the Covenant.

To the people of God, that room was the place where Yahweh dwelled. It was God's house, and it was most holy. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter that sanctuary. But there, in that encounter, we see the simple faith of a child before God Most High. There in that sacred space, God reveals Himself to his daughter, Abigail. He manifests his presence to her in a shimmering light and in the miracle of a loaf of bread. Do you remember it? Here is an excerpt:

I hesitated outside the Holy of Holies, separated only by a floor-to-ceiling curtain with cherubim woven in golden thread, and called out in a strained whisper, 'Yahweh, if You're in there, please have mercy on me. I'm simply obeying my ima.' Like swallowing a spoonful of fish oil, I broke through the curtain and ran inside. Eyes closed, I waited for the death blow.

Nothing. No rumble of thunder or fire from the sky.

I opened my eyes, repositioned the loaf of bread under my arm, and scanned the wide room. Two gargantuan golden cherubim extended their wings over the famed golden box that ima called the Ark of the Covenant. She said Yahweh dwelled atop it, but I saw no cloud or fire of our invisible God – which I supposed made sense. He was invisible. I walked under the cherubim's wings and around the gold box, studying the greatest treasure of my ancestors. Dare I touch it?

I broke off a piece of bread and placed it on top of the Ark. Maybe Yahweh would appear if I gave Him small bites...

A huge hand clamped over my mouth and nose, making breathing impossible...

Spots formed in my vision. Desperate for air, I searched the top of the golden Ark again. *Please, Yahweh. Show me your presence.*

In little more than a blink, I saw a glimmer, a shimmering of air above the Ark, and then it was gone. *You are real!*...

Ashpenaz shoved me toward the curtain and I cradled the loaf as if it was as sacred as the Ark itself. Yahweh was real! He hadn't saved Jerusalem from the Babylonians, but He'd shown Himself to me.<sup>viii</sup>

This knowledge of the presence of God would be something Abigail would cling to in her darkest hours, even when it felt like Yahweh had abandoned and forgotten her. When she felt all alone and God seemed...gone.

To understand what Daniel and the exiles knew and believed about God's presence, let's take a few minutes to look up the scriptures below. We'll trace Israel's history from Exodus to Babylon. In Genesis, God had spoken specifically to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But what we'll see as we pick up the story here in Exodus, is how God for the first time since the Garden of Eden revealed Himself *to His people*, as their God who would dwell in their midst (Exodus 6:2-8).

As you read, write down any observations you have about God's presence with His people. How did He reveal Himself to them? How did the people know God was with them?

Exodus 13:20-22

Exodus 19:16-20; 24:15-18

Exodus 25:1-2,8-10 & 21-22; 40:16-21 & 34-38

2 Samuel 7:1-2 (the words of King David)

1 Kings 5:1-5; 6:12-13; 7:51; 8:6-13 & 27-30

The children of Israel had seen God with their eyes and heard Him with their ears. In Daniel's day they had both written and oral testimony carried down over generations of how God came down to them in a pillar of cloud and fire, and on a mountain in smoke, thunder and lightning. They had seen His glory descend upon the Tabernacle with Moses and upon the Temple with King Solomon. The Ark of the Covenant was a constant physical reminder to them of God's continual presence, dwelling with them in their midst.

You can imagine, then, why it was so confusing and frightening for the people of God when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Without it, there was no place for God to dwell *with them*. No place to offer sacrifice. There was no place to meet with God...or for Him to meet with them. So, what did this mean? Had He forgotten them? With the Ark of the Covenant gone, was God gone, too? Had He turned His back on them? Forgotten His covenant? Were they left alone to fend for themselves in the streets of Babylon?

Have you ever felt this way? Questioning like Abigail in the Esagila? *"Yahweh would never find me here. Could Yahweh find me anywhere in Babylon?"*<sup>ix</sup>

Or have you ever been apathetic like Daniel nearing 70 years of exile who had *“become numb to the passion he once felt to return to his homeland, believing that without a Temple in which Yahweh dwelt, there was no need to return.”*<sup>x</sup>

Have you ever questioned the presence of God in your own life? Can you describe that time in your life and what made you feel that way?

Think back on the novel. Even though the Ark was far off, do you think God was still present with His people even in Babylon? Explain your answer below.

### **God is present everywhere**

A powerful theme throughout the book was God’s revelation that He was still present with his exiled people, even in Babylon. He answered the prayer of seven children who *“cried out to a Hebrew God whose presence rested on a golden box far away in Jerusalem.”*<sup>xi</sup> He was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the furnace (literally!) (Dan 3:23-25). He heard and answered Daniel’s prayers by sending the angel Gabriel as soon as Daniel started praying (Dan 9:20-23). He humbled and restored Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:28-37). He mysteriously wrote on a wall (Dan 5:5,24). He shut the mouths of lions (Dan 6:22). Even without the Ark, God revealed He was still with them. He is present everywhere. Even when circumstances might tend to make you think otherwise. *He is with you.*

Let’s look at just a couple more verses to help us get a grasp of God’s omnipresence, the glorious, comforting truth that He is everywhere...always watching over His children.

Ps 23

Ps 33:13-22

Ps. 139:7-10

To make these scriptures more personal, write out a prayer of response to God. Perhaps thank Him for His presence. Or write out a prayer of faith saying you believe this to be true about Him.

## God's Desire to be Present with His People

Considering what we just studied about God's omnipresence (that He is everywhere), let's take this a step further. From Genesis to Revelation, it is not only true that God is omnipresent, it is also true God's strong heart's desire is *to dwell with His people...to be with them* as their God and live with them relationally.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lived and dwelled with God in perfect communion. Scripture says He walked among them (Gen 3:8-9). When they chose to sin against God, Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden, no longer able to live in His presence. This seems like a hopeless scenario for mankind.

*But God...* motivated by love for His children that they might return and dwell with Him again...set out a great rescue plan to restore relationship and bring His children back into fellowship with Himself. He made a way for them to dwell with Him in His presence forever!

Go ahead and peek at the end of the story in Revelation 21:3. Write out the words of "the loud voice from the throne" below:

The whole story of the Bible culminates in this verse. It's like the finale. The last, harmonious, forte note in a moving symphony. This is the plan of God throughout the whole Bible coming to fruition. In fact, the heart of God is summed up in this declaration found throughout the story of the Bible. The prophets in Daniel's day spoke of God's *desire* for His people...

Look up Jeremiah 32:38 and Ezekiel 37:27. Fill in the blanks below:

They shall be \_\_\_\_\_, and I will be \_\_\_\_\_.

So, when we read of the Temple of Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant and how it was God's dwelling place with His people, consider it in the context of God's overarching desire and redemptive plan to bring His people back to Himself that they might dwell with Him in His presence *forever*.

Write down two or three "feeling words" in response to the truth that God wants to be with His people.

It makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

On a scale of 1 to 10 how difficult is it for you to believe God wants to dwell with you? (1 being "God wouldn't ever desire to be with me" and 10 being "I am certain he wants to be with me") Give an explanation for the number you chose?

When we truly believe God is with us *and* wants to be with us, how might this affect the way we read the Bible and pray?

## Part 2 | From Daniel to the Cross

### *Jesus came to dwell among us*

After Babylon, a remnant of Judah returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The sacrificial system was reinstituted and resumed, however, there was no visible presence of the Lord for the people. The Ark had been carried off. There was no cloud, no smoke, no fire. No obvious and miraculous signs or wonders. And any new words from prophets ceased. It was quiet, once again leaving the people to have to exercise faith that God was truly still with them and His promises were trustworthy.

And then...400 years later...On a still night, *God came to dwell with His people again*. But this time, it was not in the form of fire or cloud. It was in the form of a human baby, Jesus of Nazareth.

What name is ascribed to Jesus in Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23? What does it mean?

Look up John 1:1 & 14 (ESV). In these verses, Jesus is the Word. Fill in the blank below from 1:14.

The \_\_\_\_\_ became \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ among us.

In the Greek, the verb *dwelt* literally means “to pitch a tent” or “to tabernacle”. Jesus came as the new *and better* Tabernacle and Temple of the Old Testament! God had previously shown His presence to His people in the Tabernacle and Temple, but in the incarnation of Christ, He was manifesting His presence in human flesh to come and dwell and walk among them.

*But why?*

Since the Garden, God had been making working out a plan to bring mankind back into relationship with Himself. To bring His children home again. But the Law, the Temple, the Priests and Levites, the sacrificial system...none of it was enough. All of it was pointing forward to something more...a better way. A true and final way where God’s children could be back with their Heavenly Father, reconciled and at peace with Him. A way for sin to be dealt with and people be made clean and righteous once and for all. What do these verses say about this?

John 1:9-12

Galatians 3:26

Galatians 4:4-5

Colossians 1:19-22

We read in our previous lesson that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

*Jesus came to dwell with us on earth in order to make a way for us to dwell with Him forever.*



What does it mean to you that Jesus would come to earth and live and dwell among us in order to bring us back to the Father?

How might that truth make a difference to you in your everyday life, whether at home or away?

In conclusion, read Ephesians 1:3-10 and write down any “Wow!” thoughts you have as you read.

Look carefully at the last two words of vs. 4. What motivated God to choose to adopt us as His sons and daughters?

Take your “Wow!” thoughts from above and turn them into a personal prayer before God, responding to what He has done for you in Christ Jesus.

### **Part 3 | In my Life**

#### ***What does it mean in my everyday life that Christ now lives in me?***

In the section above we read how Christ came as *Immanuel*...God with us. And He came to make a way for us to be with God forever. That’s mind blowing to me! He so strongly desired to adopt us as His children in order to have us back in fellowship with Him, that He was willing to send His own son to become flesh, dwell among us, and live and die on a cross for our sins, *so that we might live and dwell with Him forever*. Just sit in that a minute and let it wash over you. You are infinitely loved, embraced and welcomed into the family of God, beloved! You are an adopted son or daughter of God Most High!

*But what does this mean for us in terms of God’s presence?* When God raised Jesus from the dead and He ascended to Heaven, back to His throne at the right hand of God, didn’t His presence leave earth as well? If Immanuel is “God with us” and He is now in Heaven, then how is God *with me*...and *with you*?

What we will uncover in this final section is the gorgeous hope of the Gospel. It’s absolutely everything to us as believers in Christ Jesus.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples and many other people. He then took his disciples to the top of a mountain and ascended to Heaven in their midst. In His final moments with them, He reminded them of a promise, and told them to wait for it. Look up John 14:16, 25-26 and Acts 1:8.

What was this promise? \_\_\_\_\_.

The disciples waited in Jerusalem and not many days later, the promise was fulfilled. Read Acts 2:1-4. What words are used to describe what this event was like?

Going back to what we studied in part one of this lesson, where else in the Bible is God's presence with His people described as "fire"?

What do you think the apostles and other disciples were thinking and feeling in the moment?

For you and me on this side of the cross, this one account in scripture should bring us to our knees in both awe and wonder, and in humble gratitude and praise. You see, in that moment, God's presence changed its address. God's dwelling place with humanity had moved from the Garden, to Mt. Sinai, to the Tabernacle, to the Temple, to Jesus Christ...and now...to us, *the church*. God poured out His very Spirit into the hearts of believers in Christ.

Because Christ took sin and paid for it entirely, when people repent and place their faith in Him, they become holy and righteous (2 Cor. 5:21).

*In this, Jesus made a way for human hearts to become God's dwelling place.*

The New Testament is chock-full of references to this new reality of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers in Christ. Let's take a moment to look up a few of them. As you read, jot down anything specific you read about the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9-11, 14-16

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Eph 2:18-22

1 John 4:13-16

The truth that we abide in God and God abides in us has profound meaning for us as brothers and sisters in Christ. Read this list below of what it means for the Holy Spirit's presence to dwell in us. **Circle** the one that resonates most deeply with you today.

1) You are never alone. Ever. God is always with us, closer than your breath (Acts 17:28).

2) We are fully known by God (Gal 4:9 & 1 Cor 8:3) and have the great privilege of knowing God through His Spirit in us (1 John 4:7-8). God not only lives in you and wants to be with you...but He fully knows you inside and out and loves you no matter what. Unconditionally. Forever.

3) God's gift of the Holy Spirit is irrevocable (Rom 11:29). He will not leave you (Heb 13:5b). He is faithful and true.

4) In Christ, you are bound together in one Spirit to the whole church, the universal people of God (Eph 4:3-6).

5) The Spirit is our hope of glory both now and forever (Col 1:27). He is the seal over our hearts guaranteeing our future inheritance in Heaven (Eph 1:13-14).

6) The power of the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. We no longer need fear evil, sin or death. His resurrection power is at work in you (Rom 8:11).

7) His nearness is our comfort and guide through this life (Acts 9:31, John 16:13).

Maybe you wanted to circle more than one! What glorious hope for us! There are many more we could reference, but for the sake of maintaining our focus in this lesson on the indwelling presence of God, let's spend a moment wrapping up in self-reflection.

Now that you have read through several scriptures and the list above, how does this affect the way you think about the times in your life when you have felt alone?

How does it affect the way you think about God's presence with you right now?

Is it a comfort to you? Why or why not?

Think about the way the Holy Spirit is working in and through you to bring glory and praise to Christ Jesus. In this dark and lonely world, is there anyone in your life that needs to see the reality of the presence of God dwelling *in you*?

After studying the presence of God, what is one thing or one attitude you would like to change in your life as you move forward? How will you do this? Can you think of someone in your life who might be able to help you take steps forward in this?

Let's end with this beautiful prayer found in Eph 3:14-21. How might you make this into a personal prayer for you? Use the space below to write out the thoughts of your heart before your Heavenly Father.

## Lesson Three

### *I Am, and There is No One Besides Me*

#### **Part 1 | Who is Yahweh?**

##### ***God loves a humble heart***

So far in our time together we've already dug deep into God's Word. Well done! In Lesson One we discovered what scripture says about the one, true God and responded by praying the *Shema* from Deuteronomy 6...to love Him with all of our heart. In Lesson Two we reveled in the truth that God desires to dwell with His people and found peace in knowing because of Christ and the gift of His Holy Spirit, we are never alone.

Today we will turn back to the story of Daniel, focusing in on the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. Ooh...I know. Just hearing "Neb" makes me cringe a little. He's not my favorite character. But we have some lessons to learn from him. Some ways his life might act as a mirror to our own, reflecting our sin and folly.

Before we even open our Bibles, take a minute and write down any words you might use to describe Nebuchadnezzar, recalling any chilling scenes from the story that encapsulate him as a man.

Mesu described one of his victory parades in this way...

*The trumpets blared, and Daniel stood in his customary position at the top of the grand stairway of Babylon's palace, waiting once again to feign congratulations for another of King Nebuchadnezzar's conquests. This time the victory for Babylon's king, meant devastation for Daniel's homeland. Jerusalem and Yahweh's Temple had been burned, razed to the ground and lay in total ruin...*

*The roar of celebration moved like a wave of the sea as the king paraded toward the palace on the Processional Way. With every conquest, large or small, Nebuchadnezzar led his captives in a train with the wealth of their conquered kingdom trailing behind them on camels and ox-drawn carts...And waiting at the palace entrance on every occasion were his royal counselors, Daniel included, to heap praise and glory on the best military mind in history.<sup>xii</sup>*

Now you and I probably don't relate much with conquering kingdoms and parading captives, but when we peer a little deeper into the heart of Neb, we might find some unsettling similarities to our own.

#### **God Hates Pride**

Let's begin by turning to Daniel Ch. 3, the story of Neb's golden statue. Just before in Ch. 2, we read how Daniel had revealed the king's dream of a great image made up of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. In that image, Babylon was the golden head and the other parts of the statue (silver and so forth) were the other kingdoms that would rise up after Babylon.

With this in mind, what might have been some of the thoughts or motivations in Neb's heart? What do you think he might have been declaring to the world in constructing and setting up an image made entirely of gold?

As you read through 3:1-23, how many times do you read of the image being "set up by Nebuchadnezzar"? Why do you think the author (Daniel) emphasizes this point to the reader?

Why did Neb react in such rage when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow (3:19)?

Have you ever pursued something or "set up" something for self-gain? When things don't go "your way" how do you typically respond?

Now skip ahead to chapter 4. Neb has a second dream and Daniel interprets it again. What is the nature of this dream (4:20-26)?

What must the king do in order for his dream not to come to fruition (4:27)?

Does he heed the warning? What words was he speaking when the voice from heaven fell on him (4:28-30)?

What great sin of his heart is revealed in these words?

Why did God humble Nebuchadnezzar for seven years?

Why do you think God hates pride so much?

The answer to this question is revealed as we seek to define pride.

## Pride Defined

Nebuchadnezzar's pride was his downfall in the same way it has been the downfall of humanity since the Garden. Pride was at the core of Satan's tempting of Eve...*Don't you want to be like God? You don't really need Him, do you* (Gen 3:1-5)?

Pride was at work in men's hearts when they erected the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 (Incidentally, it was constructed in the land of Shinar, the *same location* in Daniel 1:2, referring to Babylon and the house of Neb's god). Let's read the account in Gen. 11:4. Note any similarities between the words of the people in Gen. 11:4 and those of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:30.

Essentially, pride is when the heart says, "I don't need God." It's when people, made by God, in the image of God, turn away from Him as their Creator and look to themselves to meet their own needs instead of depending on Him.

We hear this same chorus of pride in Isaiah 47:8,10 (NIV or ESV). What phrase does God accuse the Babylonians of saying in their hearts? Write it below.

\_\_\_\_\_, and there is \_\_\_\_\_ besides \_\_\_\_\_.

We might call this the *Motto of Humanity*. From the Garden to the Tower of Babel to the streets of Babylon, the prideful heart sets out to make a name for itself.

In what ways have you heard this motto echoed in your own heart? Can you give an example of some way you have set out to make a name for yourself? Maybe in a career or ministry area? Or maybe in a relationship, a bank account, social media or something else?

Based on what we've studied so far, try writing out your own definition of pride in the space below.

Here's a helpful summary of pride from The Gospel Project:

*Pride is what causes us to connect every experience and every conversation with ourselves. In a sense, pride is the sin beneath every other sin because at its core, pride is self-worship. What makes pride so dangerous is that it can be subtle, perverse, and sometimes undetectable.<sup>xiii</sup>*

Pride is self-motivation, self-exaltation, self-absorption, self-promotion, and self-worship. It's seeking satisfaction for ourselves and by ourselves apart from God. Pride is the root of all other sin. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis further describes pride and why it is so dangerous.

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...

... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.<sup>xiv</sup>

## God and Pride

The Bible says God hates pride. Look at these verses from Proverbs that give us a glimpse of God's feelings about pride.

Prov. 8:13 – "...Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate."

Prov. 16:5 - "Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished."

Prov. 16:18 - "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

So, from what we've studied thus far, why do you think God is so serious about pride?

To help us consider this a little further, let's look at one more quote by Andrew Murray from his book, *Humility*. As you read, **underline** anything that helps explain why God hates pride.

As God is the ever-living, ever-present, ever-acting One – who upholds all things by the Word of His power, and in whom all things exist – the relationship of man to God could only be one of unceasing, absolute, universal dependence. As truly as God by His power once created, so truly by that same power must God, every moment, maintain. Man need only look back to the origin of existence and he will acknowledge that he owes everything to God. Man's chief care, his highest virtue, and his only happiness, now and through all eternity, is to present himself as an empty vessel in which God can dwell and manifest His power and goodness.<sup>xv</sup>

Yahweh, the I Am – God Most High and the Creator of all things – He hates pride because it's what separated his children from Himself in the Garden and has been separating them from Him ever since. As the source of all existence, the supreme God, and the purely good and righteous God, He knows that union with Himself is best for His children. He knows we truly thrive and experience satisfaction and

delight when we are totally dependent on Him. We find our truest meaning and purpose when we live the lives we were created for...lives of worship, exalting *His name*, instead of our own.

But doesn't this make *Him* arrogant, then? Isn't his desire to have all people come and worship Him and fall at His feet prideful? By no means!

God is always motivated by pure goodness and love for His creation. And He knows He alone is our greatest good. Our pride builds up walls (and towers and golden images!) in our hearts and turns our gaze off of the beauty of our Creator and onto the creation. It keeps us from what is best. It tells me I am the queen of my own little kingdom and incites me to do whatever I must do to rule and subdue the world around me...for my selfish gain. The result is me living for my glory instead of bowing to God as the rightful, supreme King of the universe for all eternity. Continuing in pride is like following a path that leads in the opposite direction from God. The opposite direction of our greatest good. That's why it's so dangerous.

*Essentially, God hates pride, because God loves you. His command to worship Him alone is our greatest good. It's His grace and mercy towards us.*

So, as we wrap up this section, dear one, does this truth cause you to pause and consider the presence of pride in your own life? Does it challenge you to view the living God, your Creator, in a different light? Hopefully, it helps you think twice about being casual with pride and allowing it to linger in the rooms of your heart.

Nebuchadnezzar did not stop and pay attention to consider Daniel's God. He wore arrogance like a necklace and flaunted it for all of the world to see. Let's not be careless with pride. Let's not accessorize with arrogance, friends. Like Neb who had to learn the hard way, pride will certainly catch up to us and lead to destruction in some form or fashion.

As we conclude this session, write one thought or a prayerful response below. Perhaps take a moment to lift up and exalt the name of the Lord. He is worthy. Or maybe reflect on ways the root of pride has led to your own personal golden image or "balcony experience".

## **Part 2 | From Daniel to the Cross**

***But emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant...***

If Nebuchadnezzar is the personification of pride, then Jesus Christ is that of humility. And if the pride of one man, Adam, was the downfall of humanity, then the humility of one man, Christ Jesus, was its salvation and restoration.

In this section, we'll gaze together on the stunning beauty of the humility of Christ Jesus. His whole life was characterized by humble obedience to God the Father. It was His humility that moved Him to leave



heaven and come to earth. In humility He washed dirty feet and walked with sinners. And ultimately, it was humility that led Him to the cross. It's because of the pure and holy humility of Christ Jesus that you and I are reconciled to God today.

One of the clearest descriptions of this is found in Philippians 2:1-11.

As you read this text, focus in on vv. 6-8. **Make a list** of anything describing the person or the work of Christ Jesus:

- He was in the form of God (He was God and was with God.)
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Now go back and read 2:1-8 again. **Underline** in your Bible every time you read the words *mind* or *count*.

What kind of mindset did Jesus have both in heaven and on earth?

What kind of mindset are we to have as His followers?

The posture of Jesus' heart before God, the Father, is revealed even more fully in the following verses. Take a minute to look them up then **jot down** the ways in which they describe the humble attitude of Christ before God the Father.

John 5:19, 30

John 6:38

John 7:16

John 8:50

John 12:49-50

John 17:1-5

Luke 22:42

How would you sum up the constant state of Jesus' heart before God?

It was the perfect love and trust Jesus had for the Father from eternity that led Him to pour out His life in submission to the Father's will. Murray writes,

Christ was nothing, that God might be all. He resigned Himself with His will and His powers entirely for the Father to work in Him. Of His own power, His own will, and His own glory, of His whole mission with all his work and His teaching, He said, "It is I; I am nothing; I have given Myself to the Father to work. I am nothing, the Father is all."<sup>xvi</sup>

The humility of Christ before God the Father made it possible for Him to carry out his predetermined plan to bring His children back into fellowship with Him again.

It was also from this humble position before God that Jesus was able to love and serve others. His willingness to take the form of a servant before men flowed from his mindset of humility before God (Phil 2:7). As He surrendered to the will of God, He was able to humble Himself before others, allowing the Father in Him to do His work through Him for all the world to see.

We see this so clearly in Luke 22:42.

The Biblical story begins in a garden with one man saying, "Nevertheless, my will, not yours.", and it culminates in a garden with the One Man, Jesus, saying,

"Nevertheless, not \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_ be done."

Have you ever uttered something that sounded like this to your Father in Heaven? When?

Finally, let's look at the last verses in our Philippians passage, vv. 9-11.

What is the first word of vs. 9? \_\_\_\_\_.

*Therefore...* It was *because* of the humble submission of Christ that God exalted Him to the highest place. Jesus ultimately lost nothing by giving everything to God. The Father honored His trust and did all for Him, and then exalted Him to His own right hand in glory.

In every way Jesus sought to carry out the will of the Father and exalt His name. And in turn, the Father made a name *for Him*. A name far above all rule and authority. (see Eph 1:19-23)

Friend, this is your God! One who humbles Himself and reaches down into the muck and mire of humanity. Who doesn't consider His glory anything to hang on to, but empties Himself to become a human. And not just any human, a servant. He came to get dirty, walk among us, heal, forgive and show us the glory of the Father. And, He did this *because* He was clothed in humility. He had several

opportunities to grab hold of fame. To ride the bandwagon of popular opinion and rise to new earthly heights. To allow the applause of men to turn Him towards selfish gain. But in every moment, He chose to go low. And lower and lower still, unto the point of death and hell. But God honors the humble. He exalts the lowly in His time.

Humility is the way of God. It is the way of love. And Jesus came to reverse the curse of pride and restore and establish humble love as the cornerstone virtue in the Kingdom of God. He lived, breathed and died a life of total submission to the Father, so that we also might live, breathe and die lives of total submission to the Triune God. As creation utterly dependent on Creator and as children looking only to the Father to fill and satisfy.

Dear one, consider the humble heart of your King Jesus.

Bow before Him in a moment of reverent praise. Give thanks to Him for his heart of humility. Speak of His beauty. Bless his humble birth, life, and death that led to our great salvation. And then confess that He is the risen and exalted Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Write out your prayer below.

### **Part 3 | In My Life** ***The Clarity of Humility***

In the first section we peered into the heart of Nebuchadnezzar (and into the heart of humanity) and discovered pride. After defining pride, we spent time considering why God hates pride so much. This led us into the Gospel in part two. We marveled at the beautiful picture of Jesus Christ, emptying Himself and laying down His life to carry out the Father's will to bring His children back into a humble, right, relationship with Him again.

In this final portion of our lesson, we'll consider the crucial importance of clothing ourselves with the humility of Christ Jesus before God and others.

In Phil. 2 we saw how humility is a mindset. To get serious about humility in our own lives, we must first *think rightly* about God, ourselves and others.

In Romans 12:2-3a, Paul writes to the church about the importance of engaging their minds in worshipful living.

How are we to be transformed (v. 2)?

What will the renewing of our minds help us do?

How are we to think about ourselves (v. 3a)?

Look up these other verses that teach us about the importance of how we think. As you read, underline in your Bible each command about the mind or how we are to think as new creations in Christ.

I Cor 1:26-31

Eph 4:17-23

Col 3:1-3

1 Pet 4:1-2

Because Christ has set us free from the power of sin in our lives and united us with Himself, we now have the ability to hear His truth and respond in humble clarity. What grace!

Let's peek back at Neb's process of coming to this right way of thinking. His heart was so full of pride he refused to listen to the merciful warning of Yahweh. He did not change his thinking, in fact, the literal translation in Dan 4:30 says he "answered" or "responded" with his boastful proclamation, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?". King Nebuchadnezzar's response to God's merciful warning was a flagrant "sticking his nose up" at Heaven.

Now read Dan. 4:34-37.

When Neb's reason returned to him, what was his great realization?

Do you have any clouded, prideful ways of thinking that need a transformation? What truth can you proclaim that will lead you to a right view of yourself before God and others?

True humility before God is *the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for God to be all.*<sup>xvii</sup>

As we set our minds on Christ and position our hearts in submission before Him as our Lord, His Spirit will work in us this blessed grace of true humility.

The evidence will be our lives overflowing in humble service to those around us as we begin to lay aside our own glory for the purposes of Christ Jesus. We'll lower ourselves that another might be lifted up. We'll sacrifice our time, our comforts, our fame and applause, even our wants and desires to point others to the King. The King of humble love. Our lives will be marked by His humility, gentleness, patience and love. And even more, as the church collectively puts on humility and casts off individual

pride, it will result in glorious unity...and the world will notice. Let's renounce the chorus of pride and make the humility of Christ our life song.

As we close our time together, what one thing might the Holy Spirit be prompting you to change? Maybe an attitude? A relationship? Taking pride seriously? The posture of your heart before Him as your God?

We'll end today with an allegory. In the book *Hind's Feet on High Places*, the main character is led by The Shepherd on a journey to discover the freedom and joy of true Godly love. On her journey she hears the happy song of the waters rushing down into the Valley. The Shepherd opens her ears to understand the water-language. Perhaps this is where you are, beloved. When we trust God and offer ourselves to Him fully, then a life of humility will be our greatest joy.

#### **The Water Song**

Come, oh come! Let us away-  
Lower, lower every day,  
Oh, what joy it is to race  
Down to find the lowest place.  
This the dearest law we know-  
"It is happy to go low."  
Sweetest urge and sweetest will,  
"Let us go down lower still."

Hear the summons night and day  
Calling us to come away.  
From the heights we leap and flow  
To the valleys down below.  
Always answering to the call,  
To the lowest place of all.  
Sweetest urge and sweetest pain,  
To go low and rise again.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Lesson Four

### *How Long, O Lord?*

#### Part 1 | Who is Yahweh?

##### *Is God trustworthy?*

We've all been there...feeling like we're Israel wandering around in the wilderness, waiting (and waiting) for the promised land. Thinking, "God, is what you say *for real*? Because not much around me looks like milk and honey right now."

Or maybe like David when he was surrounded by deadly enemies, his energy spent, his soul bone dry, we join him with thoughts like, "How long, O Lord? Have you forgotten me? I can't hold on anymore. Can I really trust you in this fight?"

As you read *Of Fire and Lions*, maybe some of you identified with Daniel, questioning if Yahweh could keep His promises when there seemed no possible way they could ever come true. Remember his words in Chapter 19:

*Throwing the final scroll into the third basket, Daniel closed the lid and heaved a frustrated sigh. How could Yahweh let the Ark, the golden altar, the table of showbread, the lampstands – all of it be hacked up into pieces? If a remnant returned to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecies, they would have to rebuild Jerusalem and Yahweh's Temple, including every sacred item that made worship possible. How Lord? Even the Esagila, the temple of Nebuchadnezzar's patron deity, didn't contain the wealth and splendor of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. How could Jeremiah's prophesy ever come to pass?*

*Daniel lifted one basket to his shoulder and began the short walk home. It's up to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to return to Jerusalem, Yahweh. I don't have that kind of faith anymore.<sup>xix</sup>*

How about you? Can you describe a time in your life when you've had to wait on God? Maybe for something that seemed impossible? Or perhaps there is something you are having to trust God for right now.

Waiting is hard. Longsuffering stirs up questioning, doubt, and anxiety over our lack of control. It causes us to really have to ask ourselves at a deep level, "*Is God trustworthy?*" Does He keep His promises? Is He faithful *to be* who He says He will be and *to do* what He says He will do?

In your own personal wilderness, in your hard fight, in your own "extended stay in Babylon", do you consider God faithful?

Consider the things you are waiting on right now in life: A relationship, salvation of a loved one, a career change, personal growth in a specific area, freedom from an addiction, or to see God come through in an impossible situation...Name one or two examples from your own life.

Now choose one of those things and fill in the blank below while searching your heart for an honest answer.

Do I trust God with \_\_\_\_\_ in my life?

No matter the season of waiting on God we are in, we will find strength for the journey when we increase our knowledge and affirm our faith in the fact that *God is indeed trustworthy*. He is faithful, true, and always keeps His promises.

Let's look together at what the Bible has to say about the nature of God's trustworthiness. Write down any observations you make about how God is trustworthy in the space provided.

Deuteronomy 7:9

Exodus 6:8

Joshua 21:43-45

Nehemiah 9:8

Hebrews 6:13-18

As you read these verses, what common thread stands out to you?

Fellow child of God, if we are to wholeheartedly love and follow God, living out the *Shema* we studied together in Deuteronomy 6, then we must *know and believe* that He is trustworthy, and that every word He says is true.

When we believe this in our heart of hearts, we can throw our lives on Him in utter abandon, knowing that no matter what circumstances are happening around us (or to us), *God is faithful*. He is faithful to Himself, to His Word, to His creation and to His children. And, yeah, we can take that to the bank.

But what about the times when He seems far off or when you feel like He's forgotten you? What about when you feel utterly spent in the waiting and the longing? God's Word says the Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as we may understand slowness (2 Pet 3:9). In His infinite wisdom and sovereign rule, He is working *all things* out for His glory and our good.

It took forty years in the desert for God's people to learn to walk with Him. To learn to *trust* Him. I look back on my life and remember times of incredible pain, confusion, and desperation for things to change, times when there just seemed to be no way out and it felt like I couldn't see my right hand in front of my face. But it was in those times of waiting, longing, wrestling and crying out to God that He was teaching me to trust Him...He was teaching me He is *trustworthy*.

Looking back on your own seasons of waiting and longsuffering (or current season), do you see ways God was teaching you about Himself? Or teaching you to trust Him more? Describe one of those ways.

God's faithfulness to His children means they never leave His sight. Even when it doesn't seem like it, He faithfully remembers and stays true to His covenant, His promises and His Word of truth. In His loving, sovereign rule, not one detail is overlooked in the process. In our waiting, He doesn't just kick back and busy Himself with other divine tasks until it's time for things in our lives to change. He didn't just abandon his people in the streets of Babylon until the 70 years was over. *His faithfulness is constant.* It's relational and rooted in steadfast, covenantal love.

Read God's words to Moses in Exodus 3:7-10 regarding the longsuffering of his people under the hand of Pharaoh. What words do you read that describe God's awareness towards His people's situation?

Child of God, in your time of waiting, do you believe Yahweh intimately sees, hears, and knows your circumstance and the cries of your heart? How might this bring you comfort in a season of longsuffering?

In the process and in the outcome, God is faithful and trustworthy. *Do you believe it?*

He is never early, never too late, and always right on time. He will always bring to pass what He has promised. He will always be faithful along the way. You might have heard the phrase, "God is who He says He is and He will do what He says He will do."

As we conclude this portion of our lesson, what are some promises of God we can count on right now in our seasons of waiting?

## **Part 2 | From Daniel to the Cross**

### ***All the Promises of God are "Yes!" in Christ Jesus***

In Part 2 of each *Lesson from Babylon*, we spend time uncovering and celebrating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our story. So, carrying on in our current theme of God's trustworthiness, let's again consider how Christ fits into this.

There are many promises of God found in the Bible, some made to individual people, some to nations. Some were fulfilled in that day (like the return of the exiles to Jerusalem at the end of 70 years under Cyrus) and some were fulfilled centuries later.

Open your Bible and let's read 2 Cor 1:19-20. It says something fairly radical about the Son of God, Jesus Christ. What is it?



Ultimately, every promise in the Old Testament, from the Garden to the last prophetic word spoken, has been fully met in Christ. What does this mean?

According to the ESV Study Bible, it means that, “The fullness of God’s faithfulness is on display in Jesus Christ. Rather than having a duplicitous “Yes and No” posture, God has spoken a singular “Yes” in Jesus. In his life, death, and resurrection, Christ Jesus is the Yes to every one of God’s promises.”<sup>xx</sup>

All the way back to the Garden, from the first day sin entered human hearts...Jesus is the “Yes!”, the promised offspring in Genesis 3 to deliver humanity. In God’s covenant with Noah, Jesus is the “Yes!”, taking on Himself the flood and fury of God’s wrath, becoming the Ark of salvation for all men. Jesus is the ultimate “Yes!” in Genesis 12 when God promised to bless all peoples on earth through Him (see also Acts 3:24-25). When God’s people broke covenant with the Father through lawless deeds, Christ Jesus was the “Yes!”, the once and for all sacrifice for their unfaithfulness and offered means for them to keep covenant with God forever. To the exiles, Jesus is the “Yes!” of a new and better Temple and the “Yes!” of return and restoration. He came to dwell among us and establish and build up His church in which the Spirit of God would dwell and carry out His work. And in Him we are able to once and for all return to the Father and find healing and restoration for our souls.

Let’s read and consider Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Daniel would have been familiar with this text). What does God promise in this passage?

Now read Hebrews 8:5b-6, 9:15 and 10:11-18. How is Jesus the “Yes!” of the promise in Jeremiah 31?

So, what does this mean for you and me? How does the “Yes!” of Jesus Christ affect our trust in God?

When we need assurance that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do, we need to look no further than the incarnation, cross and resurrection. All the promises of God are a resounding “Yes!” in Christ Jesus...past, present and future. We can be certain that every hope of ours, every longing, every promise God has made *has been* and *will be* fulfilled in Christ.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is our clearest evidence of God’s faithfulness. It’s the proof He is trustworthy, and it’s our daily assurance and our living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

How does the death and resurrection of Christ affirm your trust in God when you are in a season of waiting?

Because Jesus is our “Yes!”, the Bible says we can place all of our trust in Him. In Christ, we can draw near to God our Father in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:21). He is our living hope. Like throwing all our

chips on the table and holding nothing back, we can count on Him for everything we need for salvation, both now and forever.

As we wrap up this section, look up 1 Peter 1:13. On what should we set our hope?

How much of our hope does it say we should set on this grace?

While all the promises of God were *fully* met in Christ in his death and resurrection, the church is still waiting for the final Day He will come again and *fully* make everything right. It's like everything is already finished, but not yet completed. Because God is trustworthy and has kept every promise in Christ, we can know for certain He will keep his promise to come again...and we will see His face.

Read this verse from Rev 19:11 and **circle** the two names used to describe Jesus:

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True..."

Do you believe Jesus is Faithful and True (past, present and future) and that you can place your hope in Him?

How might your life look different if your hope was fully set on Christ and on the grace that will be revealed when He comes again? Perhaps use Romans 8:18-25 to help you reflect.

### Part 3 | In My Life

***What does it look like for me to wait well and trust in God's promises?***

#### **Waiting Well**

Think back to part one to your list of those things you are currently waiting on God for. Maybe it's a desire for some direction on whether or not to apply for that job, or the mending of a broken relationship? Or perhaps you are waiting for healing or an opportunity for that dream to take wings?

OK...so now ask yourself the question. How *well* am I waiting? **Circle** a number between 1-10. 1 being "I'm not waiting well at all!" and 10 being "I'm great at waiting!"

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Why did you circle the number you did?

What do you think has the most influence on how well you are waiting?

What might a person look like who is “waiting well”?

Let’s turn to Hebrews 10:19-25. As you read, **underline** in your Bible four ways the author of Hebrews encourages us to respond in faith to who Jesus is and what He has accomplished.

Essentially, these are instructions for the church on how to live and “wait well” in our time here on earth until Christ returns. We can draw near to God in full assurance, hold fast to hope in Him, consider ways to encourage others in love and good works, and continue to meet together in regular fellowship.

Which of these is a strength for you? Which one is a growth area?

How might growing in one or more of these areas help shape or change the way you are currently waiting on God and move your number closer to a 10 on the number line above?

For the remainder of our time together we’re going to camp out in the Psalms, a series of poems and songs mostly written by David. In them we hear the raw and real emotions of the human heart poured out before God and an example of what it looks like to wait well in the middle of adversity.

Here are four ways we can follow David’s example and “wait well” in our seasons of long suffering.

***We can be honest with God***

As we read in Exodus, God hears, sees and knows your current state. Nothing you can say will surprise Him or cause Him to turn His back on you. What he wants most of all from you is your heart poured out before Him. If the waiting is hard, tell Him. If you’re scared, tell Him. If you need an answer, ask Him.

Look up Ps 62:8. Write an honest prayer to God, pouring out your heart to Him with anything that is difficult to wait on in your life right now.

***We can preach to ourselves –***

Sometimes in our periods of long suffering we stop hearing the truth and this affects how well we wait. In Exodus 6:9, we read how Moses proclaimed to the people God's intention to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians. He was announcing to them the good news that God was going to bring them out of slavery and into the promised land, but, it says, "they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery." In their despondency and desperation for things to change, they had become deaf to the promises of God. The loud groanings of their flesh were drowning out the voice of truth and hope.

Beloved, if you are in a place like this today where it's hard to hear anything more than deep sighs of despair, follow David's example and preach some Gospel hope to your soul today. Remind yourself of the truth. And be loud about it.

Jerry Bridges in his book *Trusting God* talks about his own journey in trust, "I mistakenly thought I could not trust God unless I felt like trusting him (which I almost never did in times of adversity). Now I am learning that trusting God is first of all a matter of the will, and is not dependent on my feelings. I choose to trust God and my feelings eventually follow."<sup>xxi</sup>

Read Psalms 13 and 42. What different emotions is David feeling?

How does he encourage himself in the waiting?

What specific words can you preach to your soul as you wait on the Lord?

***We can remember His faithfulness in the past***

Similar to preaching truth to ourselves, we must be intentional to remember the mercy and grace of God towards us in the past. When we recall God's faithfulness to us in times before, we'll have renewed strength to wait well and count on Him to be faithful in times ahead.

Psalms 77 is one of a series of psalms written by a man named Asaph. Read vv. 7-15 and note how Asaph remembers God in the middle of heavy troubles. How does remembering God's faithfulness strengthen him?

Can you think of a time when God wondrously showed his steadfast love to you? How might this strengthen you in the middle of your trials?

***We can look to Him for strength and comfort***

God promises to give us the strength we need to face any trial that comes our way. He also promises to be with us and comfort us with His love as a good shepherd comforts his sheep. However, many times when our fiery trials seem a little too hot, or when desperation gets the best of us, we are tempted to trust in other things for strength in our longsuffering.

Ps. 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

In what "chariots and horses" are you tempted to place your trust and look for strength?

Now turn to David's words in Ps. 28:7-9. Summarize these verses using your own words and write it as a song to the LORD.

In conclusion, give a specific example of how the Lord has been your strength in the waiting.

Dear ones, as we wait, let's make it our aim and purpose to wait well. Let's make Hebrews 10:19-25 the prayer of our hearts. Let's preach to ourselves daily the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and set all of our hope firmly on Him...and on the day He will most surely return.

*Our God is trustworthy.* Do you trust Him? Do you believe in His promises?

When you're full of doubt and ready to hang up your hat, when you are exhausted and spent from extended longsuffering...hang on. Hold fast. Keep trusting Him with all you've got.

He is faithful and true. He will surely not delay. Our God will always come through.

## Lesson Five

### *Evidence of Mercy*

#### Part 1 | Is Yahweh Merciful?

##### *Is God merciful?*

There's an old children's book titled *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Throughout the day, nothing goes right for poor Alexander. From morning to bedtime both at school and at home it feels like the whole world is against him. It's so unfair! All he wants to do is escape and move to Australia.

Like me, I bet you can relate. I'm sure you, too, have had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad, day, or season, or year! Maybe in the middle of things not going your way, you've had the thought, "*What did I ever do to deserve this?*"

Similarly, in *Of Fire and Lions*, it was very difficult for me to read Mesu's description of the attack on Jerusalem and the horrors done to the Judeans by King Nebuchadnezzar. My heart was stirred with compassion when I read of the children captives separated from their parents and walking miles in the desert, or of Abigail being thrown into temple service. When confronted with the magnitude of their suffering, we may tend to think, "*What did they ever do to deserve that?*"

Take moment to recall some of the thoughts and emotions you had as you read of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the exile of God's people in the novel. Write a few of them below.

In this lesson, we'll draw deep from the well of God's mercy. We'll consider ways in which God is infinitely merciful and what it means for us to be objects of His mercy.

But first, in order to more fully grasp God's mercy, we must examine it alongside God's justice, or His just judgment. The two go hand in hand. The awesome magnitude and beauty of God's mercy always shines brighter when held up and viewed next to His perfect justice.

##### *Is Yahweh just?*

In your own words, what do you think it means to be *just*?

Merriam-Webster offers synonyms such as: *righteous, reasonable, proper, lawful*. It's the idea of being totally conformed to what is morally upright and good.

A real-life example of a *just* judge would be someone who sits in authority in her courtroom and listens to a case of a guilty person charged with a felony. She, acting as a just judge, would then execute justice in a reasonable, proper, and lawful way, condemning the convicted felon to a punishment that fits the crime. A just judge would not condemn a person with a misdemeanor to a prison sentence fit for a

felon. And vice versa, it would not be considered just to condemn the Unabomber to community service. At the heart of justice is moral goodness and righteousness.

So, when Scripture declares that God is just, it is saying He:

1) is perfectly righteous, good and upright. His heart and His ways are always right (Deut 32:3-4).

2) shows no partiality in His judgment over His creation (Rom 2:6-11 & Acts 10:34).

3) punishes evil and rewards good in perfect equity. His decisions and judgments are always reasonable, lawful, and proper. He will judge the one who oppresses another (Col 3:25; Heb 6:10; 2 Thess 1:6).

Look up Psalms 7:8-11 & 96:9-13. How is God described in these verses?

Read this quote by J.I. Packer from his book *Knowing God*. Underline anything that sticks out to you, personally, regarding God's justice.

"...the Bible's proclamation of God's work as judge is part of its witness to His character. It confirms what is said elsewhere of His moral perfection, His righteousness and justice, His wisdom, omniscience, and omnipotence. It shows us also that the heart of the justice which expresses God's nature is retribution, the rendering to men what they have deserved; for this is the essence of the judge's task. To reward good with good, and evil and evil, is natural to God."<sup>xxii</sup>

To sum it up, because God is all knowing and all wise, perfectly good and upright, and the supreme creator and sustainer of all things, He alone possesses the right to sit in authority over all of His creation. From the overflow of His heart He acts in flawless morality, goodness and order. Therefore, as the chief governor over all creation, He maintains the right to sit as judge. He governs the universe because it's rightfully His to govern, and He rules over it in goodness, righteousness, and perfect *justice*. Not once, ever, has God executed judgment on the world unfairly. As the perfect judge, He cannot. He alone sees and knows all, even into the heart and motive of every person.

*So, what does that mean for us as humanity?*

Read Romans 3:10-11, 23. What do these verses say about the human condition?

Now look up Romans 6:23 and write it out below.

According to these verses, what does every person deserve?

The same was true for the people of Judah. They had been given God's Law. They had been warned by prophets to obey. They had even sworn to obey. But soon they rejected and rebelled and did what was right in their own eyes. They were lawbreakers. And God in His perfect justice executed a right and fitting punishment in exiling them to Babylon.

Wrapping up this part of our study, look up Leviticus 26:14-17,33. These are the last words of the Law given by Moses to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai (Lev 26:46). Joshua reiterates them to the people in Joshua 23:14-16. **Read both** passages and answer the questions below.

According to these passages, what would be the consequence of Israel's disobedience if they chose to rebel against God's law and break covenant with Him?

How do you think this scripture relates to the main characters in *Of Fire and Lions*?

Whether talking about Daniel and Abigail or you and me, every single soul since Adam and Eve has sinned and been guilty as a lawbreaker before God, the just judge.

Do you believe God is a *just* God? Why or why not?

Do you view sin as deserving of God's just punishment and wrath? Why?

Before we can begin to appreciate and marvel at the depth of God's mercy, we must have an awareness of what we are guilty of and what we truly deserve. If we do not understand that we are all guilty as lawbreakers against God Most High and deserving of death, then we will not be grateful that we are even breathing in this moment, and even more, that God has extended to us a welcome into His family.

With this in view, we can read of the destruction of Jerusalem and instead of asking, "*What did they do to deserve that?*" we can shake our heads in wonder and ask, "*What did they do to deserve the continued compassion of God in their rightly deserved punishment for sin?*" Why didn't God just wipe them out in just judgment for their continued rebellion?

The answer is found back in Leviticus 26:44-45, the final words of the Law right after God's warning of punishment for disobedience. What does it reveal about the heart of God?

The answer, beloved, is His mercy. God's overarching, powerful, moving, active, unbelievable, merciful, lovingkindness towards those that don't deserve it. Yahweh knew His people. He knew their hearts. And



He knows *our* hearts. He knows we are all prone to wander, prone to rebellion, and prone to prideful and selfish motivations. You and I are just as deserving of punishment as the people of Israel were. And yet, at the same time He is seated on His throne and ruling in perfect justice, He is also reaching out to us in infinite mercy. This truth paves the way to our next point...

### ***Is Yahweh merciful?***

After pausing to consider God's justice, we now turn to revel in his mercy. It's a word often confused with grace, but equally marvelous.

Simply put, mercy is *not getting what you deserve*.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Think of a real-life example of mercy and write it below. Maybe a time when you've been shown mercy or when you've shown mercy to someone else.

Jen Wilkin in her book *In His Image*, offers a fuller explanation of God's mercy. Underline the first two sentences as you read the passage.

God's mercy is his active compassion toward his creation. It is his response to suffering and guilt, both products of the fall. How far does it extend? "The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made" (Ps 145:9). God is infinitely merciful, but he exercises his mercy as he chooses, according to his sovereign will. He chooses upon who he will have mercy (Rom 9:15). He is obligated to show mercy to none, but we find him throughout the Bible demonstrating mercy toward sinner and saint alike.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Look up these three verses that speak of God's mercy towards His creation. What other words are also used to describe God's mercy?

Exodus 34:6-7

Jeremiah 31:20

Lamentations 3:21-23 & 31-32

In the Scriptures, the word, *mercy*, is one of my personal favorites. Sometimes you'll see it also written as *kindness* or *lovingkindness*. In the Old Testament Hebrew, it is translated *hesed*.

The best definition I've come across in communicating God's *hesed* is one by Carolyn Custis James from her book *The Gospel of Ruth*.

Two parties are involved—someone in desperate need and a second person who possesses the power and the resources to make a difference. *Hesed* is driven, not by duty or legal obligation, but by a bone-deep commitment—a loyal, selfless love that motivates a person to do voluntarily what no one has a right to expect or ask of them.

They have the freedom to act or to walk away without the slightest injury to their reputation. Yet they willingly pour themselves out for the good of someone else.<sup>xxv</sup>

*Mercy is God's tender lovingkindness towards those that cannot help themselves.*

We need only read as far as Genesis 3 before we see the first act of *hesed* towards mankind. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and thus experienced the consequence of their sin. But God chose not to wipe them out. Instead He clothed them and breathed promises of hope to them in the midst of their cursed consequence. We see it again in Genesis 6-9 with Noah. God is wholly justified in sending a flood, and yet He mercifully saves, provides, and offers a promise of hope in the form of a covenant rainbow. God continues to show *hesed* as He leads Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David...and the list goes on.

Now skip ahead on Israel's timeline to the exile...the historical context of the novel. Think about Daniel, Abigail, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah. What evidences of God's *hesed* towards His people come to mind as you recall events in the story?

For me, I thought of the bread of the presence that gave Abigail strength and the goose fat that was balm to their lips and feet at the beginning of their journey. I thought of the way God protected and strengthened the Hebrew princes in their first days in the palace. All of these were *evidence* of His mercy towards them in the midst of their suffering.

Now think back to a particularly difficult time in your own life (or maybe you're going through one right now). What *evidences* of God's *hesed* have you experienced in the midst of your trial and suffering?

At the end of the book, Daniel, in his old age, speaks to Sheshbazzar of the evidence of Yahweh's mercy he had seen in the land of exile...

*I've felt His presence when He reveals a dream or vision. I saw Him standing in a brick furnace with my three best friends. And I watched Yahweh transform an arrogant king into a beast and then turn him into a ruler who acknowledged his limitations.*<sup>xxvi</sup>

It was because Daniel intimately knew Yahweh to be merciful (and at the same time knew He was just) that he cried out to Him at the end of the 70 years of exile.

Open to Daniel 9 in your Bible (in the novel it's found in chapter 20). Read the entire prayer focusing on these questions below:

1) How did Daniel view both himself and the people of Judah?

2) How did Daniel view God and His actions? How many times do you read the word “mercy”?

3) What was Daniel’s hope?

Like Daniel in his prayer, in this lesson we have been made aware that we are all guilty and deserving of punishment by a just God. And we have also seen His overwhelmingly compassionate, kind and merciful heart that moves towards His creation in their sin and suffering.

The question for us is, how do the two (justice and mercy) coexist in our lives? God in His perfect justice cannot simply excuse our sin of breaking His law. He’s the perfect judge. And yet we alone are helpless to be able to do anything to clear our guilt and escape deserved punishment. And so, like Daniel, our only hope is found in the beautiful lovingkindness of *Yahweh*.

Because of his *hesed* towards us, in His infinite wisdom and sovereign power He created and carried out a plan. A plan in which He could execute perfect justice in punishing the sins of humanity, and at the same time show compassion out of His blazing heart of mercy for mankind.

His plan culminated in a place where justice and mercy meet...a place called Calvary.

## **Part 2 | From Daniel to the Cross**

### ***Where Mercy and Justice Meet***

In this section, we will once again turn our gaze to the cross. The place where the wisdom of God, the justice of God, the mercy or the *hesed* of God are on fullest display.

In the novel, do you remember Daniel and Abigail in Babylon eagerly looking for captured items from the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem? The golden lampstand, the altar of incense, the table of the bread of the presence, the Ark of the Covenant...all of these were not only indicators of God’s presence with His people (like we studied in Lesson Two) but the Temple (and its treasures) were also the place and means by which the people would make sacrifices to God to cover their sins.

Interestingly, the covering of the Ark of the Covenant had a particular name. Look up Exodus 25:17-21. What was its name?

What was its purpose? (Exodus 25:22 and Leviticus 16:11-16,30)

How did both justice and mercy meet on the Mercy Seat?

Animal sacrifices were God's *merciful* provision for His people. The innocent animal would unjustly die in order to pay the *just* price for the sins of the people. The blood of the animal covered their guilt as breakers of God's covenant and law.

Now look up the following verses and in your own words describe how the cross of Jesus Christ both executed God's perfect justice and showcased His deep mercy towards us.

Rom 3:21-26, 5:8, 8:1-4

Eph 2:1-6

Col 2:13-14

1 Pet 3:18

When you read these verses, how does it make you feel?

Beloved, in Christ, you are no longer condemned because of your sin. You are forgiven and set free! You once were deserving of God's just punishment, but Jesus took your sin and guilt and the Innocent One (the Just One) became the justifier. He justified you (made your heart right) before God and brought you near to Him, into His forever family!

*Why?* Because He is merciful.

God's heart beats with mercy and compassion towards a world deserving of just judgment. We have traced it through the scriptures, from Adam to Noah to Daniel and to the cross. And now, even today in this very moment, that mercy is being poured out over you.

What does Lamentations 3:22-23 say?

God's mercies towards us are new every morning! That is GOOD NEWS and is cause for a wide smile to spread across your precious face!

Write a prayer of response below as you sit in the wonder of God's *mercy* poured out you towards you. Personally reflect on what it means that you have been *justified* and forever brought near to God, your Father, by the cross of Christ.

As we conclude this section, may the words of this hymn wash over your soul, granting you fresh perspective as you rise to face your day...

***Thy Mercy, My God***

Words by John Stocker (1776)

Music by Sandra McCracken

*Thy mercy, my God, is the theme of my song,  
The joy of my heart, and the boast of my tongue;  
Thy free grace alone, from the first to the last,  
Hath won my affections, and bound my soul fast.*

*Without Thy sweet mercy I could not live here;  
Sin would reduce me to utter despair;  
But, through Thy free goodness, my spirits revive,  
And He that first made me still keeps me alive.*

*Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart,  
Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart;  
Dissolved by Thy goodness, I fall to the ground,  
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found.*

*Great Father of mercies, Thy goodness I own,  
And the covenant love of Thy crucified Son;  
All praise to the Spirit, Whose whisper divine  
Seals mercy, and pardon, and righteousness mine.<sup>xxvii</sup>*

**Part 3 | In My Life**  
***Go and Do Likewise***

One of the many powerful scenes in *Of Fire and Lions* is the humbling of King Nebuchadnezzar for seven years. While his beastly transformation is certainly a true account (we studied this in Lesson 3), the time spent at the estate in Borsippa was a brilliantly added fictional piece found in chapters 28-33 of the novel.

Daniel and Abigail realize the opportunity to show *hesed* to Neb and Amyitis and sacrificially spend those years away from loved ones in order to help those that could not help themselves.

In light of the mercy they had been shown by Yahweh, they chose to live their lives in that same manner towards others. Neb had done nothing to deserve their compassion and care. Quite the opposite, actually. And yet, because of mercy, they acted towards him in such lovingkindness.

In the same way, you and I have been shown great mercy in Christ Jesus. How should we respond to this mercy? How should our lives look different because of God's mercy poured out to us?

Read Romans 12:1-2 and Titus 3:4-8. What do these verses indicate for the life of a believer who has received God's mercy in Christ?

In Romans 12:1 (NIV) Paul urges his Roman readers to live holy lives *in view of God's mercy*. In other words, because we have been mercifully justified by grace, and cleansed of guilt and sin by the work of Christ, we have nothing to prove and we now live our lives in light of this. It's with this mercy in view that we now pursue good works, service and holy living.

We have also been commanded by Jesus to *show mercy*. Christ has commanded his followers to look at others with compassion and then sacrificially give their lives to help them, like Daniel and Abigail did.

You are probably already familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan, but let's go ahead and open up to Luke 10:30-37, taking special note of verses 33 and 37. After you read it through, answer the questions below.

How does the text describe the three men who saw the man lying helpless on the side of the road.

Which one of those men felt compassion?

*Note: A person from Samaria (or a Samaritan) was considered unclean by the Jews and was strongly disliked and strictly avoided at all costs.*

What was Jesus' question at the end of the story?

What was His command?

The Samaritan man expended himself to show mercy to the man in need. Similarly, Christ Jesus has shown mercy to us. He left heaven, crossed social and cultural barriers, even gave His own life so that we could be healed and live.

Who is someone God has placed in your path to whom you also may “go and do likewise”?

Because we have been shown mercy, we are to go and extend mercy. Our Merciful King has left us an example to follow in His footsteps. His *hesed* should ring in the hearts and flavor the lives of all who dwell in the Kingdom of God.

As we close this lesson, look up Matthew 5:7. Write it out in the space below.

Dear one, because we are recipients of such great mercy, we should *be merciful*. As we have been shown great *hesed* in Christ, we are to show *hesed* to others. Let your final thoughts be those of asking God to help you show mercy to those around you. Pray for the faith to believe His indwelling Holy Spirit will move your heart to compassion and give you the strength to lay down your life to help those that cannot help themselves.

## Lesson Six

### *Walking in the Light*

#### Part 1 | Who is Yahweh?

##### *God is light*

Today's lesson from Babylon is drawn from another major theme laced throughout Mesu's novel. It is one of darkness and light.

Belili (or should we say Abigail?) had become a pro at keeping secrets of her past suppressed and hidden in the dark corners of her soul. She knew well how to play the game – what to say or not say, what emotions to show or hide – all without letting anyone, even her beloved family, know of her dark past. The result was living a life shackled in fear, riddled with shame, and bound by lies that kept her from the fullness of love and freedom found in the light of Yahweh's love and forgiveness.

In her fight to survive, Abigail felt as if she'd lost her soul to the powers of darkness. They had ravaged her body and spirit as a slave girl in the courts of Mithra. In her desperation, she rose to the position of high priestess and made vows to the false god. She had committed high treason against Yahweh. He would never accept her again. Coming into His light meant opening the floodgates of shame – too much for her to bear. It meant facing her greatest fear of losing all those she held dear, namely her beloved Daniel.

So, she locked those secrets away. She hid them behind masks and kept them in the dark by never bringing up the past that haunted her. But as hard as she tried, they would not keep silent. Below is an excerpt from the scene where she and her eldest daughter, Kezia, are seated on cushions in the courtyard. Belili knows she must confess to her. Read this description of what she felt...

*I felt tears sting my throat. The secret pounded at my heart's door, begging to be freed. I can't tell her. Not Kezia. She'd hated me longer and stronger than any of my daughters. I inhaled a deep breath to relieve the urge to confess, but still my secret screamed inside me...*

*The secret became a living thing within me, now clawing, shrieking, ranting to come into the light. I shot a panicked look at Mert. 'Tell her, Belili. She needs to know.'*<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Have you ever been there? Have you ever had something so dark and secret, hidden for so long that it was screaming to be brought into the light? That's what this lesson is about today. It's about coming into the light and finding that when we do, we will find the freedom and rest our souls so desperately desire.

But first, before we do some heart work, let's consider what the Bible says about God as light.

Think about something that is associated with the dark. What emotions do you feel when you picture it?

Now think about something that is light. What emotions do you feel?



Let's do some digging to see what the Bible says about God and light. Write down any observations you make as you read these verses:

Genesis 1:1-4

Psalms 18:28

Psalms 27:1

Psalms 119:105

Isaiah 60:19-20

1 Tim 6:15-16

1 John 1:5

Revelation 22:5

What one thing stood out most as you read through the verses above?

To the Jew, the light of God was synonymous with life and truth and darkness with death and deceit. Read this quote from John Piper about God's light and truth from the context of 1 John 1:5-6. As you read, underline the words "light", "truth" and "true".

What does John mean that God is light? One answer would be that God is *truth*...In other words, God is light means that God is the source and measure of all that is true. Another way to put it would be that nothing is truly understood until it is understood in

the light of God. This is why the Old Testament says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). You don’t even get to first base in true knowledge if you leave God out of account. Which is why secular education is such a mirage of hope in the contemporary wasteland of our culture. *God* is light. That is, *God* is truth. He is the source of all that is true and whatever is true is true because it conforms to him.<sup>xxix</sup>

A helpful example might be a haunted house. Have you ever been to one? Have you ever been to one that turned on the lights as you stepped inside the door? No? *Why not?*

Because in the dark, reality is distorted. There is a sense of danger because you cannot see the way. In the dark we feel threatened and fearful of things that hide, lurk in the shadows, and show themselves to be what in reality *they are not*.

But when the lights are turned on in a haunted house, it’s no longer scary. Horrific characters are revealed as just college kids needing a part-time job. The maze of dark hallways and themed rooms lose their power as all is revealed as just everyday make-shift props.

The same is true when we think of the Kingdom of God. When He created the world there was light and life. There was no fear, no threat, no hiding – the *way* was as clear as day. When sin entered human hearts, a dark shadow fell over all. The world became a realm of darkness...sin and death blackened human hearts. Mankind has been fumbling around in that darkness ever since, living in fear and hiding in shame. People have lost their way.

How does the Bible describe God’s Kingdom and the world’s domain in Col 1:12-13?

How does it describe those that live in the world vs. those that live in His Kingdom (1 Thess 5:4-5, Eph 5:6-8)?

God’s desire is for all people to come and live in His Kingdom of light! When we come into the light, nothing is hidden. We no longer have to stumble in the darkness, live in fear, or hide in shame. We can grow in knowing God fully and rejoice in being fully known by Him.

But how can we escape the domain of darkness? How can we be free from the fear and shame that weigh us down? How can we have victory over the power of secret sin?

## **Part 2 | From Daniel to the Cross**

### ***Jesus, The Light of the World***

As I write this section there is Christmas music streaming in the background. It's Advent, and it seems everywhere I go I hear songs proclaiming the incarnation of Christ Jesus...the dawning of the Light of the World. Read the stanzas below and underline the phrase that speaks of Jesus as the Light. I'm sure you already know, but just for fun...can you name each song?

*Son of God, love's pure light*

*Radiant beams from Thy holy face*

*With the dawn of redeeming grace*

*Jesus, Lord at Thy birth*

---

*Yet in Thy dark streets shineth*

*The everlasting Light*

*The hopes and fears of all the years*

*Are met in thee tonight*

---

*Hail! the heaven-born*

*Prince of peace!*

*Hail! the Son of Righteousness!*

*Light and life to all He brings,*

*Risen with healing in his wings*

Hallelujah! Jesus Christ is the Light, who came and dwelled among us. He came to usher in the Kingdom of Light to a world living in darkness. He came to light the way back to God, the Father of Creation. The Bible over and over again describes Jesus as the light from God. Let's spend some time looking at a few of these references. Write down how each reference describes Jesus as the light.

Isaiah 9:2 and 49:6 (note: in these verses Isaiah is prophesying of the coming Messiah)

John 1:1-12

John 8:12

John 12:46

Imagine if a four-year-old child asked you why we say Jesus is the light of the world. How would you respond?

Think back to our haunted house analogy. In the dark we are stumbling, lost, disoriented, fearful, helpless, and swayed by deception. We don't know what *truly is* and we don't know which way to go to escape. Now picture a guide coming along with a flashlight. He guides you out and then hands you His flashlight to take with you wherever you go. You'll never have to be in the dark again.

That might be a weak example of Jesus as the light of the world. But, take a moment to look up the following verses. What do they say about Jesus as the light of the world who came to deliver us out of darkness?

John 3:20-21

John 12:35-36

2 Cor 4:6

1 Thess 5:4-5

1 John 2:8-11

When we place our faith in him, the light of His presence now dwells in us. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. That is our reality because of the triumph of the cross and the resurrection. Death and darkness have been overcome!

Look up John 1:5 in the NIV or ESV translation and write it below:

How does it make you feel to know Jesus, the light of the world, has conquered darkness forever?

Do you ever feel like you are still stumbling in the dark? How might the truth of Jesus' light shining in your heart change the way you live in this dark world?

### **Part 3 | In My Life**

#### ***Walking in the Light***

In Part Three, we are asking the question, "So what?". *"So what* does it mean for me today that His light shines in me? How should that change the way I live?"

#### **Bring It to Light**

I think the heroine of our story, Abigail, reveals the starting point of the answer to that question.

As we read above, she was plagued by dark secrets of her past. She had been weighed down by the tremendous pressure of living a dark lie all those years.

How about you? Do you have dark secrets, specific lies, areas of darkness in your life that you want no one to see? Why do you keep them locked away inside?

If you happen to have the novel near you, open up to the end of chapter 42 to the scene below...

*I laid across our bed weeping, Daniel's words gouging my soul. Nothing can make me deny the One, True God. His faith was unshakeable. Even on the eve of his arrest, even while remembering the unjust deaths of his best friends, he could say without pause that he would never deny Yahweh.*

*How could he ever forgive a wife who had?* <sup>xxx</sup>

Continue a few paragraphs down...

*A clear but silent voice resonated like a drum in my mind. Is he more precious to you than I AM? The thought stripped away all pretense, exposing the filth of my excuses and half-truths. No fear of physical or emotional pain could compare to an everlasting separation from the One who always showed me mercy. My choice was finally made. My surrender complete...*

Now go ahead and keep reading the rest of the scene through the end of chapter 42 describing Abigail's confession to Daniel.

Why was Abigail afraid to confess her past secret sin?

Why do you think Abigail brought her story to the light?

When God calls us to Himself through faith in Christ, He brings our whole selves into His marvelous light. Every sin we've committed, every lie we've believed, He sees it all. And, Christ Jesus paid for it all. The Bible says it was for freedom that He set us free (Gal 5:1)!

Beloved, because you are already forgiven in Christ Jesus, it is safe to bring your scary places into His light (1 John 1:9). When you keep unconfessed sin in the dark, it holds a power over you that it no longer has the right to hold. You have been bought with a price and are now a child of light, dwelling in the Kingdom of God. Let *that* define you. Like Abigail, surrender to the power of God's love for you in Christ and boldly bring everything to the light that you might know the mercy and grace of your Father and experience *true freedom* in Christ.

If God knows our hearts and knows all of our sins, then why do we need to confess to Him and bring things to light? How might that affect your relationship with Him?

How might unconfessed sin affect your relationship with others?

Describe a time you confessed a secret sin before others. How did you feel both before and after?

Have you allowed the Holy Spirit to shine His light on every area of your life? Is there anything hiding in the dark corners of your heart that you sense needs to be confessed before God and brought into the light?

### **Walk in the Light**

When we allow Jesus to replace dark lies with his truth, when we allow Him access to every corner of our being, our freedom is certain. We will live free, walk free, and think free as we begin to see ourselves the way He sees us and see Him for who He is. Ephesians 1:18-19 describes this as having the *eyes of our hearts enlightened* to the hope, power, grace, love, truth and freedom of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we are enlightened by the Gospel, we will be compelled to then *walk* in the light of the Gospel.

What does it mean to *walk in the light* according to Eph 5:6-21? Write some examples from the text below.

Give an example of what it looks like for you to *walk in the light* in your current life situations?

As we obey Christ and abide in His love, we will find ourselves walking in the light of His truth and presence. We will live not as unwise, but as wise children of the Father, making the most of our days.

For every dark corner we expose in His light and for every faithful step we walk in the light, He will flood our hearts with all of the riches of His love and grace. Our relationships can be healed and restored and we can move into the full purpose He has for us no longer shackled by chains of darkness and doubt.

## Shine the Light

God's intention for His children as they *walk in the light* of His kingdom is to go into the world and *shine His light* into the domain of darkness. We see this with Abigail. Once fearful and bound by darkness, she was released to go and be a light of strength and hope for her family. She was free to love (without the fear of them not loving her in return), free to share the truth of Yahweh with bold conviction. In her freedom, she was empowered and emboldened in her faith to hold fast to Yahweh's promises. And in so doing, she was a source of strength, influencing the hearts of those around her to also believe. Because Abigail obediently walked in the light, she brilliantly shone the light to those who desperately needed to see it. Reread these words from the novel. How does the light in her shine bright, affecting those in her sphere of influence?

With Daniel:

*'Nothing can excuse the choices I made, Daniel.' Her voice was flat, drawing his attention. Though her cheeks were damp with tears, her features held a peaceful glow. 'At least I know what I'd choose now.' She stopped atop the Processional Way and faced him. 'Life with idols or death for Yahweh? Belili chooses Yahweh. Abigail chooses Yahweh. I've become the sum of all my choices, and now I choose Yahweh over you, over our children, over life itself.'*<sup>xxxix</sup>

With family and friends:

*She lit up when the children crowded around her at the table, clamoring to see what treasures she bore on the silver tray. She had become Abigail again, free to love in a way Belili never dared. Yet she was still his Belili, with the strength and courage that Abigail never possessed. He loved her regardless of the name, but because her heart had changed, she now wished to be called Abigail – the girl who had won his heart.'*<sup>xxxix</sup>

With Kezia:

*'But Jerusalem isn't the city you left, Ima. It's a pile of rubble. There's nothing left after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it.' Her eyes filled with tears as did mine.*

*'You're right. It will be the most difficult thing you've ever done. But remember this. Jerusalem isn't merely a city; it's Yahweh's Promised Land. Of all the patches of dirt on this earth, Yahweh gave it to His chosen people, who have been called to reveal Him to other nations'...*

*She pulled away, swiping at tears. 'I don't like it.' Searching my face, she hesitated for a while, and I let the silence do its work. 'But we'll do it.'*

*I couldn't rejoice. I could only drop my eyes to my fidgeting hands and nod. Pain tore at my heart. Devastating, thoroughly wrecking pain. The kind that comes only to those wholly devoted, those who've held nothing back. I looked up and saw my daughter's heart breaking too. We fell into each other's arms, sharing the exquisite brokenness of loving well.'*<sup>xxxix</sup>



Beloved, as light bearers of the knowledge and presence of Christ Jesus, we are to go and *shine His light* to this dark world. What do these verses say about God's people being called and purposed to bring His light to a dark world?

Matt 5:14-16

Acts 13:46-49

Phil 2:12-16

1 Pet 2:9-12

As you reflect on these verses, where do you feel God is specifically calling you to go and shine the light of His presence in this dark world? Is there someone in your sphere of influence that needs to see the glory of the light of God shining in and through you? How will you shine His light to them?

In closing, write a personal prayer to God telling him what it means to you that He is your light and your salvation. Thank Him for sending Jesus to be your light and life. Confess your sin and your need for Him. Then ask the Spirit to continue to guide you to walk in the truth and light of the Gospel and to help you to shine that light to those in your sphere of influence.

## Lesson Seven

### *Courage in the Face of Fire*

#### Part 1 | Who is Yahweh?

##### *God is in control*

The very title of the novel, *Of Fire and Lions*, lends itself to the final theme of our seven lessons from Babylon...Courage. It took courage for the exiles to endure the trek to Babylon, courage for Daniel and his friends to refrain from the king's diet in his court and courage for Daniel to interpret the king's dream. Courage to rule the provinces and serve in the royal courts. Courage to stand when all others bowed to the golden image. Courage to face the fire. Courage to face the lions. Courage to live 70 years in a foreign land under evil oppression and courage to face the long (and permanent) journey back to the rubble of Jerusalem at the decree of Cyrus.

So far in our time together we've studied several lessons our spiritual ancestors learned while exiled in Babylon. But my guess is one of the most significant things they learned was courage. You might even say they could've earned a PhD in courage from the "School of Babylon"!

According to Merriam-Webster, courage is the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In the Bible, the Hebrew word for courage is *chazaq* (pronounced "khazack") and means to strengthen, prevail, harden, be strong, be firm, or be resolute.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Based on these definitions, give an example of someone you can think of who has shown courage.

There are numerous scenes in the novel when someone shows tremendous courage in the face of opposition. Take a minute to recall some of these examples and **write** a few below. **Circle** the one that is your favorite example of courage.

People are compelled to show courage by the strong convictions they hold about what they believe to be true. General MacArthur's famous speech to the Corps of Cadets at West Point began with these words:

Duty, Honor, Country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

There's a lot of truth in that opening statement. Most notably, *the things we believe in become our rallying points for courage in the face of danger.*

That is why for us, God's redeemed people on mission to shine His light in a dark world, our understanding and firm conviction of what we believe about God—that He is who He says He is—is absolutely vital.

Is there something you are facing in life right now that is causing you to feel faithless, hopeless and discouraged?

As you face certain opposition and crossfire in life, what is your source of courage? From where do you draw strength for your heart to stand firm in the battle ahead? For General MacArthur and the West Point Cadets it was their belief and conviction of duty, honor and country. How about you? *What are your rallying points?* In the space below, write down anything that comes to mind (beliefs, convictions, commitments, relationships) when you think of what gives you strength and courage to face the fight.

In this lesson we'll focus on the three heroes, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as they faced the fiery furnace. Their courage to stand when everyone else bowed came from a deep conviction of knowing and believing Yahweh *is who He says He is and He'll do what He says He'll do*.

Let's open up and read the Biblical account of this story in Daniel 3:4-23, paying close attention to vv.16-18. As you read it through, **underline in your Bible** what attributes of God the three Judean exiles believed to be true. What did they believe about Yahweh? After you underline them, **write** your observations below.

For the remainder of this lesson, we will highlight three beliefs Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego held concerning Yahweh and the ways these beliefs gave them courage to stand firm in the face of death. As we walk through this section together, reflect on your own personal beliefs and convictions about God—your rallying points. How do they influence your courage in the face of trial?

### 1) Our God is for us

In v. 16, the three men begin their response to the king with the words, “...our God whom we serve...”. Does this remind you of anything we've studied so far? Think back to the covenant God made with His people on Mt. Sinai in Exodus as well as the rehearsing of the law by Moses in Deuteronomy. Do you remember the conditions of the covenant? If God's people would *remember the covenant*, and *love and serve Him* by being careful to *obey His commands*, it would go well with them. They would live and be prosperous in the land and God would be with them and bless them (Deut 5 & 6).

Now flip over and read Deut. 4:25-31. Moses is reminding Israel of the law and commanding them to obey, warning them of future consequence if they harden their hearts and neglect to worship and follow God. Take a moment to consider how this passage relates to the context of the novel in Babylon.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had lived through the destruction of Jerusalem and were now experiencing the very real punishment of exile (warned over and over again by Moses and the prophets) because of the sins of God's people. They knew God's law. But they also knew God's heart. They knew if they returned to the Lord with a whole heart and committed to love and serve Him only, that He is merciful and would not leave nor destroy *nor forget the covenant He swore to them* (Deut 4:31).

So, in a sense, when standing before King Nebuchadnezzar, these three young men were reaffirming they were in covenant with Yahweh. They were publicly declaring the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6 for all the ancient world to hear...that they love and serve Yahweh, the One, true God, only (Deut 6:4-6 & 13-15). They were remembering they were a covenant people. That truth helped drive their courageous words and actions in the face of death.

Keeping this in mind, skip over to Deut. 7:6-10. In what ways does this text describing God's covenant love *towards* his people. What words are used to show God's heart is *for them*?

How might this truth have fueled the courage of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, enabling them to stand firm in the heat of the flames blazing before them?

Our three heroes knew God was a God who keeps covenant. And because of that, His heart was *for them*. He would not forget His covenant with His people. When Yahweh said, "I will be their God and they will be my people" in Ex. 6:7, He meant it. *Forever*.

Look up Psalm 56:9-11. How might knowing that God is *for you*, or that His covenant love is always towards you, influence your level of courage in facing trials?

## **2) Our God is able**

Turning back to Daniel 3:16-17, the next words spoken by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego before the king are, "...our God whom we serve *is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace...*".

Dear one, when opposition swirls around you, when you feel you are losing the fight, when fear overwhelms you...do you believe the God whom you serve is *able*?

Do you believe the God who created the world, delivered a nation out of bondage, parted the Red Sea, descended on a mountain in a thunderous smoke and flashing light, brought water from a rock, and fed an entire people miraculous manna in the desert for forty years (just to name a few)...do you believe He is *able* to deliver you?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did. Despite the decimation of their beloved homeland and their grim surrounding circumstance, they still knew He was God of Israel and He was able to deliver them out of the hand of the enemy. They *knew* it.

They had read the ancient scriptures. They had taken to heart and believed what God declared about Himself was true.

Take a moment to read these words of the Lord and write down what He says about Himself:

Genesis 18:14

Numbers 11:23

Jeremiah 32:26-27

Mark 10:27

Mark 14:36

Fellow exile, in the midst of fire and lions in your own life, do you trust that God possesses all dominion, power and strength? Are you able to say, "With God, all things are possible."? Spend a moment searching your heart. Is there anything standing in the way of you wholeheartedly believing God is able?

Is there a specific situation in your life right now where you could use a little more courage drawn from the rallying point of knowing God is able to save?

### **3) Our God will deliver**

In point two above, we declared God is able to save...or that *He can*. Now, let's take that a step further in declaring that *He will*.

Our three Judean young men tack on a surprising statement before the king in Daniel 3:17. Go ahead and read it one more time and write out below what they emphatically say God will do.

This sounds a lot like another young hero from their ancestral line who possessed the same kind of courage in the face of a foreign enemy. Read 1 Samuel 17:37 & 41-47. What did this hero say God would do?

What do you think gave these men courage (Exodus 2:23-24; 3:6-8; 14:14; Deut 1:30-31 & 20:2-4)?

Now let's go back to our story in Daniel 3. In order to grasp a fuller understanding, carefully observe the words our three men spoke to King Neb in v. 17 while you fill in the blanks below.

"God whom we serve is *able* to deliver us from \_\_\_\_\_, and he *will*  
*deliver* us \_\_\_\_\_."

Now, let's read the next verse (v.18) very closely. What three words does this verse begin with?

When they say the words, "But if not", what do you think they are saying? Does this mean they didn't fully believe God would deliver them? Explain your answer below.

Even though they fully believed God was able to save them from the furnace and would surely deliver them out of the hands of the enemy, they weren't exactly sure *how*. God in His sovereign will and ways has a plan. It's a plan that always entails justice, mercy and salvation for His people, but it may not look the way we want it to look. I'm sure Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were sincerely hoping they wouldn't have to feel the flames of a furnace seven times hotter than usual. I'm sure they earnestly desired God would deliver them *from* the fire. But, their understanding of God and His ways was so much bigger.

They trusted in His character—that He is the God who saves (Ex 15:2; Ps. 37:40). It may be physically *from* the fire, or it may be ultimate deliverance *through* the fire, but there was no doubt in their minds that God would save His people, even if it meant great suffering for them.

Similarly, on the night before Jesus carried the cross, He earnestly prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me." (Luke 22:42). Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, He knew the Father was able, and He knew the Father would ultimately bring about deliverance. But He prayed if possible, God's deliverance would not include this cup of suffering.

Are you (or is someone you know) facing a furnace in life right now? On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that God is *able* to deliver? Circle the number below.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Now, how confident are you that God *will* deliver?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

We can learn a lot from the response of Jesus and our three men. Regardless of whether or not God's deliverance would be *from* fire or *through* fire (or *from* the cross or *through* the cross) the posture of their hearts was one of unflinching resolve and humble submission.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego firmly declared, "...we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Dan 3:18). And, Jesus concluded his prayer with the words, "Not my will, but yours, be done." (Luke 22:42).

Friend, I don't know what you are facing today. But I do know we, too, can count on the fact that God is strong enough to save and that in some way He most certainly will bring about deliverance, whether from the flames or through them. He is working out His plan of redemption and salvation that includes so much more than you or I could ever imagine. Because of this, it's with a courageous, humble and resolute posture of heart we can join in saying, "*Even if God does not remove the cup of suffering, may His will be done.*"

When all is said and done, God will make all things right. He is working out all things for His glory and for our good. He is *for you*. He is *able*. He most certainly *will deliver* because that is who He is. Our God is the God who saves!

Let's wrap up this section in personal reflection. Turn to Psalm 18 and read vv. 1-6 & 16-19. How does knowing that God is a God who delivers his people encourage your heart today?

## **Part 2 | From Daniel to the Cross**

### ***Jesus, Our Rally Cry!***

As God's covenant people, we share the same *rallying points* (beliefs and convictions) as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In this portion of the study, we will take these points a step further. As Christ followers, our rallying points have become fully realized in the Person and work of Jesus. *He is now our ultimate rallying point*. Our utmost source of courage. As we grow in knowing and believing who He is and what He has accomplished, we will find strength and courage as we face the fire and lions of this life.

Glance back at the section above and write down the three rallying points of courage our Judean friends believed.

For the remainder of this study, we'll focus on the way each point above is ultimately fulfilled through Christ and how this influences our level of courage in facing suffering and trials in this life.

God is *for us*

God is *able* to deliver

God *has delivered* us once and for all

### **1) Through Christ, God is *for us***

It's hard to watch your kids (or little loved ones) struggle, isn't it? On the playground, in friendships, academics, athletics...it doesn't matter what the circumstance. When your kids are hurting, you hurt with them. When they are struggling, you want to fix it and make it all better. Why? Because he or she is your child, and you unconditionally love them with a fierce kind of love. A God-kind-of-love that says "*I am for you, no matter what*".

In my life, this is most stunningly true for our youngest son who we adopted into our family. There was a time in his life when I was not "*for him*" because I didn't know him. He wasn't my son. But when we brought him into our home (even during the pre-adoption process), he became my child...both in my heart and by law. My heart bent towards him. Now, because he is my son, I am for him. He did nothing to deserve it. Nothing to warrant my love, favor, protection or provision. But, I am and forever will be, *for him*.

Adopted child of God, Yahweh is *for you*. Christ Jesus has justified you before God and sealed your adoption into his covenant family. The heart of God is eternally bent towards you as His beloved, His chosen one.

Look up Romans 8:15-16. What have we received? What does this make us?

Now skip down and read 8:31-32. What amazing promises are true for you in Christ?

Do you believe this is true? Do you believe that no matter what suffering you face, God is always for you? Why or why not?

Now flip back a couple chapters and read Romans 5:3-5. Why are we able to rejoice in our sufferings? What has God poured into our hearts through His Spirit?



How does this rallying point feed your level of courage as you face current trials and suffering?

## 2) Through Christ, God proves He is able

Did you know Jesus' name means, "Yahweh saves!"? God has ultimately delivered us from the doom of sin, death and hell through our Savior, Christ Jesus. You may feel discouraged and beat down by all the trials of this life, but Jesus has prevailed. God proved He is stronger than sin and death when He defeated the enemy and raised Jesus from the grave.

Read these verses below and **write down** any observations you make about what God has accomplished through Christ Jesus in the resurrection. What does this mean for us?

Acts 2:23-24

Romans 6:9

Colossians 2:13-15

From what you just read, how has God proved He is able to save *through Christ*?

How might this affect your level of courage and confidence in facing hardships in life?

## 3) Through Christ, God has delivered us once and for all from the hand of the enemy

On June 6, 1944 the decisive victory at the Battle of Normandy essentially ended the second World War. We know it as D-Day. But it wasn't until May 8, 1945, VE-Day, the war officially ended. During the interim, even though D-Day had secured the victory, there were still many battles fought, blood shed and lives lost until the declaration of the war's end on VE-Day.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

This is much like the church age in which you and I currently live. You might have heard it called living in the "Already and Not Yet". Jesus Christ has *already* secured our salvation and victory. He delivered us from death and hell once and for all by His cross and resurrection (Heb 9:12). But we are still living in a broken world, experiencing the effects of the sin and fighting spiritual battles, *not yet* fully at home with Him. So, although God has *already* delivered us in Christ, we are also looking forward to the future "*Not Yet*" when all things will be made right.

What do these verses have to say about our "*Not Yet*" deliverance? What are we are looking forward to?

John 14:3

Romans 8:18-25

Revelation 21:1-5

We look forward to the second coming of our Deliverer. In the end He will make all things right. He will judge the wicked and bring His children home to dwell with Him forever! Every tear will be wiped away and there will be no more death, pain, longing or living in fear...only fullest joy in being with our victorious God and King forever.

How does believing this help you face the fire and lions in your life today?

### **Part 3 | In My Life**

#### ***Be strong and let your heart take courage***

In this last section, we'll ask the question, "What are my rallying points?" and "From where do I draw courage in the face of fire and lions?"

If you were Shadrach, Meshach or Abednego—standing there before the most powerful man on earth and thousands of witnesses, feeling sweat drip down your back from the heat of a blazing furnace, your soul shuddering from the palpable evil oppression of the spiritual realm—what would you do? What would you say?

We've studied their response. Now it's your turn. Think of a personal trial or area of suffering you are facing in life. Based on what we've learned in this lesson thus far, come up with your own personal response or declaration and write it below.

What do you think are the rallying points (or beliefs about what you know is true of God and his character) influencing your response?

If you are lacking in courage, what could you do to help strengthen your heart for the fight?

When I read of our three heroes in the book of Daniel...or of the early believers in the book of Acts and Paul's letters and Peter's exhortations to the early church experiencing severe persecution, or when I read of the believers in the Hebrews 11 "Hall of Fame"... I am humbled by their courageous faith. And yet, I am also encouraged because the same Spirit dwells in me to help me in my suffering.

Read Phil 1:18b-21 and catch a glimpse into Paul's heart while he is imprisoned in Rome. Where does He draw his courage from? Where is his focus?

Skip a few pages back to Eph 3:14-21. What is Paul specifically praying for the Ephesian church?

Take these verses and turn them into a prayer for yourself or someone else.

Finally, turn to the end of the letter to Eph 6:10-20. **Underline** all the commands as you read. Write a few of them below.

How do the promises in Eph 3:14-21 help us carry out the commands of Eph 6:10-20?

Beloved, you have been granted everything you need in Christ Jesus to persevere in your fight. As you face fire and lions, suffering and even death – remember Jesus, your ultimate rally cry! Draw courage from our rallying points of knowing and believing God is who He says He is and rehearse the truth that you are His covenant child of love.

Remember the victory of our Lord and the Spirit who raised Him from the dead who is now dwelling in you! Remember the deliverance that is already yours and is yet to come. Remember God is for you and He will fight for you. And, remember Jesus wins...both now and forevermore!

Take to heart the words of your Lord, dear one, and go out from here with your head held high. With your feet firmly planted, hands ready for battle, the armor of God fastened tight and your soul steadfast, stand firm in the strength of His might. He's got this. And *He's got you*.

"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD." (Ps. 31:24).

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 32.
- <sup>ii</sup> Crossway Bibles, *ESV: Study Bible: English standard version* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007), 1586.
- <sup>iii</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, for the entirety of this study Scripture references and quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
- <sup>iv</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 110.
- <sup>v</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2009), xvii.
- <sup>vi</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2009), xviii.
- <sup>vii</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “Christian Classics Ethereal Library”, accessed January 7, 2019, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iii.xii.html>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 25-26.
- <sup>ix</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 48.
- <sup>x</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 152.
- <sup>xi</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 78.
- <sup>xii</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 143-144.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Capps, Matt. “Pride.” Accessed January 8, 2019. <https://www.gospelproject.com/pride/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Touchstone edition, 1996), 109, 111.
- <sup>xv</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 9-10.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 23.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 12.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Hannah Hurnard, *Hind’s Feet on High Places*. (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975), 59-60.
- <sup>xix</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 155.
- <sup>xx</sup> Crossway Bibles, *ESV: Study Bible: English standard version* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007), 1556.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*, in *Be Still My Soul: Embracing God’s Purpose & Provision in Suffering*, ed. Nancy Guthrie (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 109-110
- <sup>xxii</sup> J.I.Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 129.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Jen Wilkin. *In His Image* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2018), 72.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Jen Wilkin. *In His Image* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2018), 73.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Carolyn Custis James, *The Gospel of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 115.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 280.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> John Stocker, Sandra McCracken, *Thy Mercy, My God*, accessed January 9, 2019, <http://www.igracemusic.com/hymnbook/hymns/t12.html>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 328-329.
- <sup>xxix</sup> John Piper, “Let Us Walk in the Light of God”, *Desiring God*, message from February 3, 1985, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/let-us-walk-in-the-light-of-god>.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 340-341.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 360.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 364.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Mesu Andrews, *Of Fire and Lions* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 376.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> “courage”, Merriam-Webster, accessed January 11, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage>.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> “courage”, Blue Letter Bible, accessed January 9, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H2388&t=NASB>.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Gen. Douglas MacArthur, “Sylvanus Thayer Award Acceptance Address”, delivered May 12, 1962, *American Rhetoric*, accessed January 9, 2019, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/douglasmacarthurthayeraward.html>.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Fred Zaspel, “D-Day and VE-Day”, *Credo Magazine*, written September 13, 2013, accessed January 11, 2019, <https://credomag.com/2013/09/d-day-and-ve-day-fred-zaspel/>.