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A S E R I E S I N T H E B O O K O F D A N I E L

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Against the Flow

Daniel is a book about living against the flow. Right at the beginning of the book, Daniel and his friends are dragged from their homes in Judah to a foreign land: Babylon. They are God's people living in a foreign city, with a foreign culture, and a foreign religion. What makes their faith remarkable is that they didn't simply continue a private devotion to God, but maintained a public witness amongst a society that became increasingly hostile to their faith. The book is an encouragement to us today--not to lose our nerve and allow the expression of our faith to be diluted and squeezed out of us.

“ Over and over again, Daniel makes sure that we don't miss the central point of the book: that no matter what things might look like, God is in control.

Amidst their bravery and faithfulness, it's easy to think that the lesson of the book is to live like them (which is a part of the encouragement of the book). But over and over again, Daniel makes sure that we don't miss the central point of the book: that no matter what things might look like, God is in control. Every chapter tells a different story, but each one is a story of God's control of history. He is in control of time and history; his kingdom is the only everlasting kingdom, and when all the proud, earthly kings have faded, God will still be ruling on his eternal throne.

The book is divided into two halves: the first half (chapters 1-6) is full of stories of Daniel and his friends dealing with the rulers of Babylon, featuring everything from an invisible hand writing on the wall, to being thrown into a furnace, to being thrown to a lion. These court stories exemplify faithful living in exile and provide models of how God's people should live as strangers and exiles in a foreign world. The second half of the book (chapters 7-12) is a different genre altogether, something called "apocalyptic." This is an ancient genre found in a few parts of the Bible (especially the Old Testament prophets and Revelation). It's pretty fun, but behind all of the wild imagery and symbolism, its design is to pull back the curtain on history and reassure God's people that in spite of their present persecution and suffering, God is in control and will ultimately be victorious.

In the book of Daniel we see a God who—despite how things might look—is perfectly in control and at work in us and in our world. Our prayer is that God would use this series to encourage you to keep turning towards him, no matter how much we feel we're living in a foreign land.

Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) is used in these studies.

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WEEK 1

LIVING IN A FOREIGN LAND

Daniel 1:1-7

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. **2** The Lord handed Jehoiakim king of Judah over to him, along with some of the vessels from the house of God. Nebuchadnezzar carried them to the land of Babylon, to the house of his god, and put the vessels in the treasury of his god.

3 The king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his court officials, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and from the nobility— **4** young men without any physical defect, good-looking, suitable for instruction in all wisdom, knowledgeable, perceptive, and capable of serving in the king's palace—and to teach them the Chaldean language and literature. **5** The king assigned them daily provisions from the royal food and from the wine that he drank. They were to be trained for three years, and at the end of that time they were to serve in the king's court. **6** Among them, from the descendants of Judah, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. **7** The chief official gave them other names: he gave the name Belteshazzar to Daniel, Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Are there any comments, questions, or concerns you have from this week's sermon?

What do you think of this statement from Larry Osbourne?

“In a few short decades our culture’s response to Bible believing Christians has gone from grudging respect, to a patronizing pat on the head, to a marginalizing indifference, to outright hostility.” Larry Osbourne, *Thriving in Babylon*

Have you ever experienced a time in life when you've felt marginalised, ridiculed, or opposed because of Jesus and his message (OR have you seen this in someone you love)?

Have these experiences ever made you feel like you're living in a foreign land?

Read Daniel 1:1-2

What does it mean for the Lord to give the king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon?

What questions would be on the lips of God's people at this point?

Even in a situation that would have seemed hopeless for God's people we're told that God is at work (v.2). What does this tell us about how God works in us and in our world?

Read Daniel 1:3-7

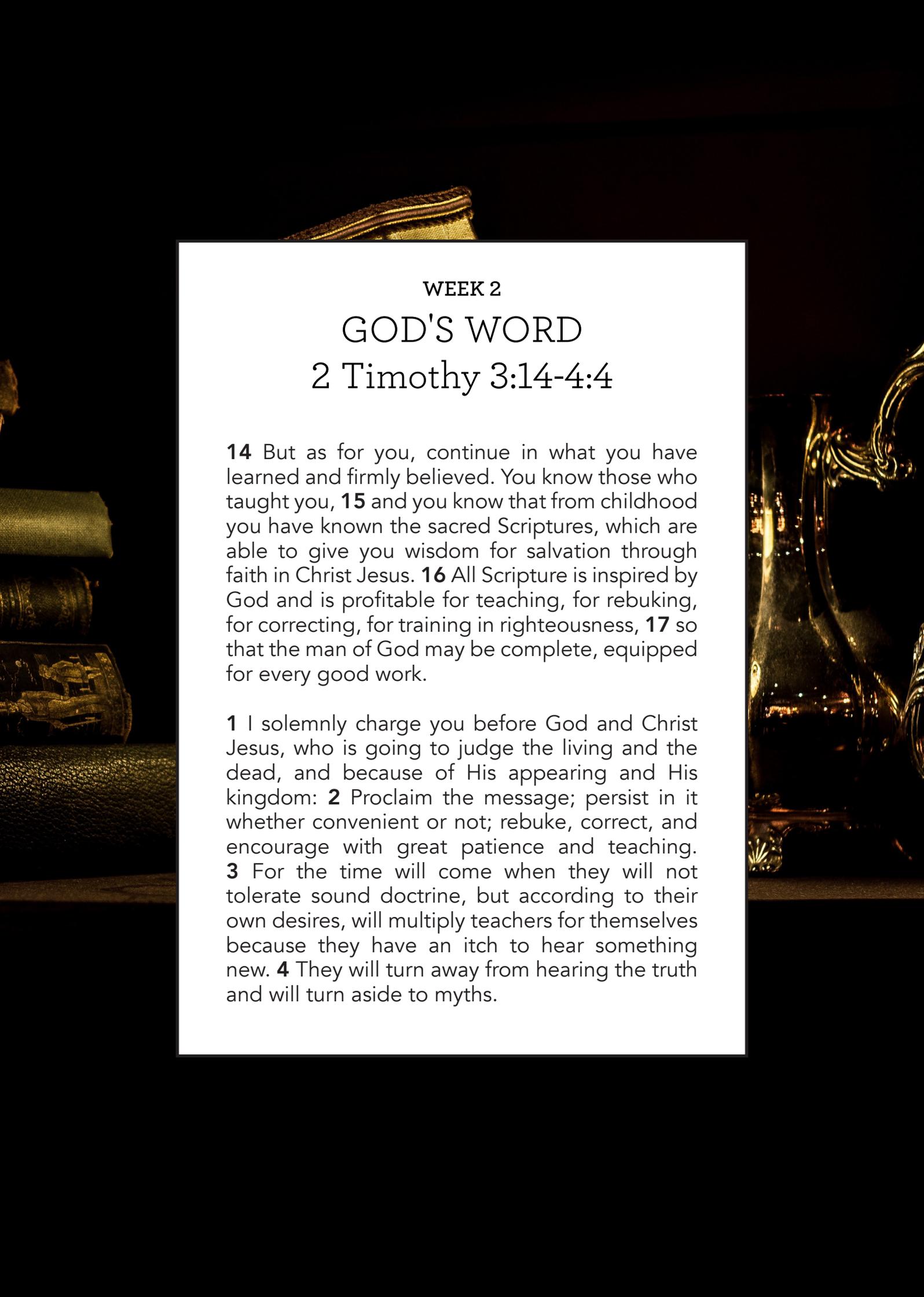
How does Nebuchadnezzar try to re-shape the cultural identity of God's people?

What are some ways that our culture challenges your cultural identity as a Christian?

Verse 4 says that Daniel and his friends read the literature and language of the Babylonians for three years. What are some of the narratives of modern-day media that influence the way you see the world (e.g. The world's vision of love; the world's definition of 'the good life')?

Get a few people to read out: Revelation 2:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:1—4.

In Daniel 1, Nebuchadnezzar gave God's people new Babylonian names and identities. But in the New Testament, we see how Jesus gives us a new name and a new identity. How might having an identity secured for you in Christ comfort you as you face a foreign world this week?

A stack of old, worn books with leather covers and a brass pitcher on a dark surface.

WEEK 2

GOD'S WORD

2 Timothy 3:14-4:4

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, **15** and you know that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, **17** so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

1 I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of His appearing and His kingdom: **2** Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. **3** For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. **4** They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Are there any comments, questions, or concerns you have from this week's sermon?

Aim: To think on how the Bible speaks and guides God's people.

What are the reasons given here for the continued reading of Scripture?

Which of these do you focus on?

Which do you avoid? Why/Why not?

What other forms of 'guidance' do you seek out?

Why do they sometimes trump Scripture for you?

What function of Scripture mentioned here do you doubt most?

This passage does not assume that Scripture ensures sound doctrine. How might knowing Scripture not be the most important thing in the life of God's children?

What are we at risk of prioritising more than reading Scripture itself?

Pray:

- That God will continue leading you back to Jesus through His Word
- That God will give you a heart, mind and spirit that yearns to read his Word
- That God's Holy Spirit will guide you and teach you as you read God's Word

WEEK 3

LIVING ON THE LINE

Daniel 1:8-21

8 Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief official not to defile himself. **9** God had granted Daniel favor and compassion from the chief official, **10** yet he said to Daniel, "My lord the king assigned your food and drink. I'm afraid of what would happen if he saw your faces looking thinner than those of the other young men your age. You would endanger my life with the king."

11 So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief official had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** "Please test your servants for 10 days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13** Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see." **14** He agreed with them about this and tested them for 10 days. **15** At the end of 10 days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food. **16** So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

17 God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. **18** At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. **19** The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to serve in the king's court. **20** In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them 10 times better than all the diviner-priests and mediums in his entire kingdom. **21** Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Are there any comments, questions, or concerns you have from this week's sermon?

Read Daniel 1:8-10

Up until this point, Daniel and his three friends have provided no resistance to Babylonian culture. They've received new names and submitted to a Babylonian education. Why do you think Daniel and his friends drew the line here, by refusing to eat and drink the king's food?

Why is the chief official even willing to consider Daniel's request (see v.9)?

Read Daniel 1:11-21

What does their refusal to eat the king's food prove? (v. 15)

In verse 2, 9 and 17 we see the same words: "God gave." What is this repetition showing to us?

Who would have known about the origins of Daniel's success?

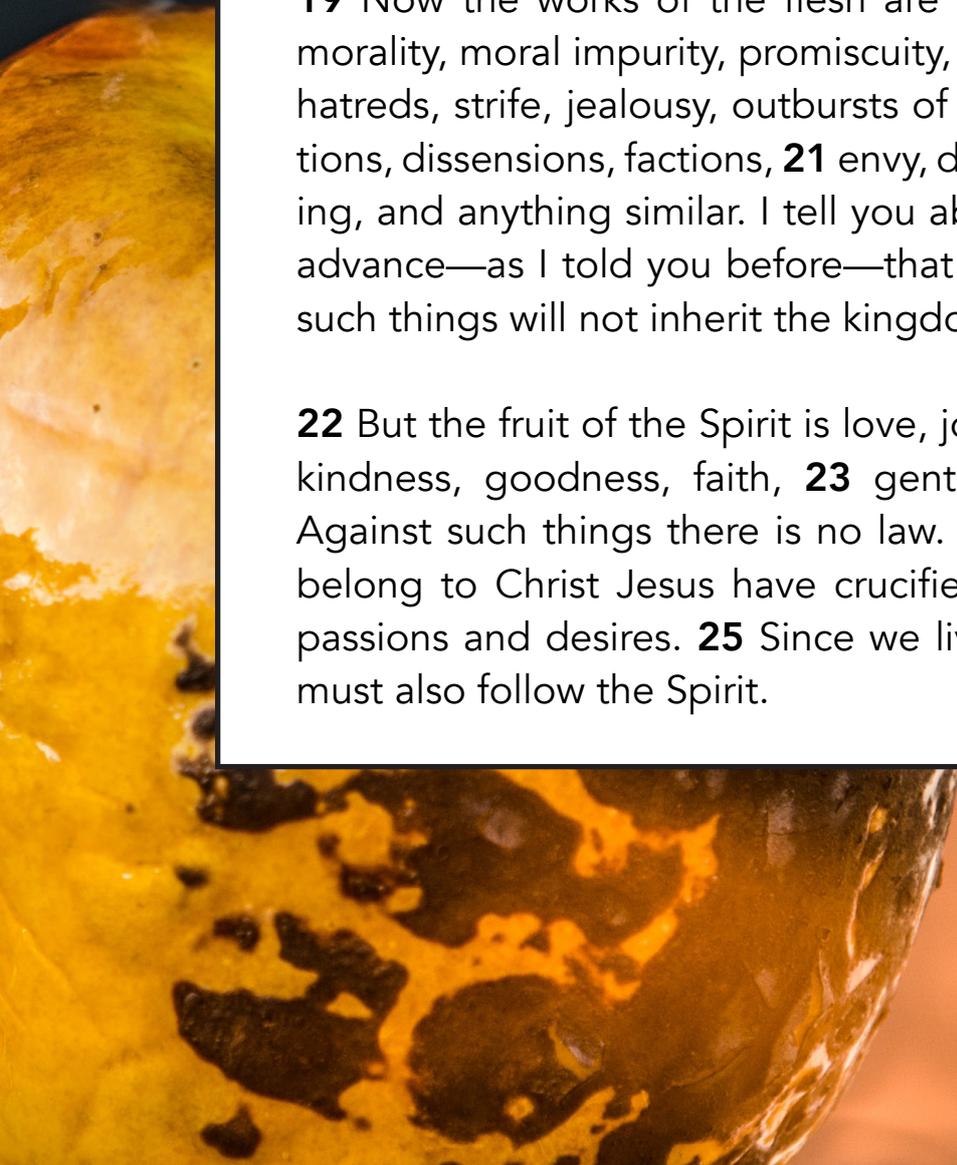
Daniel and his friends take a step in order to make their own survival dependent on the provision and intervention of God. But God blesses them and they end up standing out for positive reasons.

What is one way that your faith has made you feel different from Australian culture recently?

As followers of Jesus how might we be tempted to withdraw from our culture? How might we be tempted to assimilate with our culture?

How does this story encourage us as we live "in Babylon"?

There is no guarantee that a commitment to walk the line of faithfulness to God will yield similar results as Daniel and his friends. The cross reminds us of this. But how does God's power and provision encourage us to keep on going?



WEEK 4

FRUIT

Galatians 5:16-25

16 I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. **17** For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, **21** envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, **23** gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. **24** Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25** Since we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Are there any comments, questions, or concerns you have from this week's sermon?

Aim: To discuss what the fruit of a Christian's life should look like.

What roles does God's Spirit play in your life?

What fruit have you seen in your life that aligns with Galatians 5?

What ways do you see yourself as depending on God?

Are there areas of your life that you try to keep God out of?

If someone were to ask you right now what drives change in your life, what would you say?

How can we not hinder the work of the Spirit in our lives but rather keep in step with the Spirit?

How do we avoid falling into the trap of legalism while at the same time striving to live disciplined lives?

Pray:

- That Christ's Spirit would continue to produce fruit in our lives.
- That we would live disciplined lives fuelled by God's grace.
- That as sisters and brothers in Christ we would help one another walk in step with the Spirit.

WEEK 5

LIVING THROUGH FIRE

Daniel 3:1-30

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue, 90 feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. **2** King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to assemble the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces to attend the dedication of the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. **3** So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces assembled for the dedication of the statue the king had set up. Then they stood before the statue Nebuchadnezzar had set up. **4** A herald loudly proclaimed, "People of every nation and language, you are commanded: **5** When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. **6** But whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire."

7 Therefore, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and every kind of music, people of every nation and language fell down and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 Some Chaldeans took this occasion to come forward and maliciously accuse the Jews. **9** They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever. **10** You as king have issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music must fall down and worship the gold statue. **11** Whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. **12** There are some Jews you have appointed to manage the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men have ignored you, the king; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

13 Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. **14** Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? **15** Now if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. **17** If the God we serve exists, then He can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. **18** But even if He does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary, **20** and he commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. **21** So these men, in their trousers, robes, head coverings, and other clothes, were tied up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. **22** Since the king's command was so urgent and the furnace extremely hot, the raging flames killed those men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up. **23** And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?" "Yes, of course, Your Majesty," they replied to the king. **25** He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." **26** Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. **27** When the satraps, prefects, governors, and the king's advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there was no smell of fire on them. **28** Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent His angel and rescued His servants who trusted in Him. They violated the king's command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. **29** Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this." **30** Then the king rewarded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Are there any comments, questions, or concerns you have from this week's sermon?

Practically speaking, what controls the big decisions in your life?

Read Daniel 3:1-7

How do the events of Daniel 2 (especially vv. 36-45) impact Nebuchadnezzar's decisions in the opening of Daniel 3?

Within the first 15 verses of this chapter we are told nine times that King Nebuchadnezzar expected everyone to worship an image of himself. What subtle ways might the "root attitude" of Nebuchadnezzar be within all of us?

Can you think of a time in your own life when you had to face a compromising situation as stark as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? How did it make you feel?

Read Daniel 3:8-18

Why don't Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego feel the need to defend themselves?

Was there ever a time in your life when you were able to face a situation with the same confidence as these three men? If so, how did that make you feel?

Read Daniel 3:19-27

What's up with that "fourth man" (vv. 24-25)?

Read Daniel 3:28-30

What a turn-around! Compare Daniel 3:4-6 with these three verses (and for some extra encouragement, read the next few verses in Daniel 4:1-3). Have you ever experienced this kind of a turn-around in your own life or in the life of someone you love?

Read Matthew 4:8-11

The devil offers Jesus prestige and power if he will just worship him. The alternative for Jesus – just like Daniel's friends – was to choose to serve God and face a painful death. Not only was Jesus faithful to his Heavenly Father in this instance, but he was faithful even to the point of being "lifted up" on a cross (as the true image of a loving God); dying for our sins so that we might be freed from sin and receive Christ's faithfulness.

How might this gift of faithfulness and freedom from sin control the big decisions in your life, especially when facing compromising situations?

WEEK 6

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Therefore I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, **3** diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us. **4** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—**5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. **8** For it says:

When He ascended on high,
He took prisoners into captivity;
He gave gifts to people.

9 But what does "He ascended" mean except that He descended to the lower parts of the earth? **10** The One who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. **11** And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12** for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. **14** Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. **15** But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. **16** From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Aim: To discuss the place of Christian community in the life of the Christian.

Are there any comments, questions, or concerns you have from this week's sermon?

What are the times and reasons for when you are disconnected from your church family?

Paul underlines unity at church as an essential in the life of a Christian community. What should this unity look like?

What does unity not look like?

How might vv. 12-13 shape the way we feel about our involvement and investment in our local church community?

What is the goal of every individual that makes up a Christian community (vv. 13-16)?

What do you think is one thing you could change in your attitude or behaviour right now that would help encourage biblical unity in your church community?

Pray for our church and your place within it:

- For unity
- For those gifted with teaching
- For maturity in the gospel of every believer
- For a heart and tongue that speaks the truth in love
- For a community built up in love



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