



Unit .16

Session .02

God's Authority Sustains His People

Scripture



Daniel 4:29-37

29 At the end of twelve months, as he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, **30** the king exclaimed, “Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?” **31** While the words were still in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared that the kingdom has departed from you. **32** You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals, and you will feed on grass like cattle for seven periods of time, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms, and he gives them to anyone he wants.” **33** At that moment the message against Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people. He ate grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with dew from the sky, until his hair grew like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. **34** But at the end of

those days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven, and my sanity returned to me. Then I praised the Most High and honored and glorified him who lives forever: For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. **35** All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can block his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” **36** At that time my sanity returned to me, and my majesty and splendor returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and my nobles sought me out, I was reestablished over my kingdom, and even more greatness came to me. **37** Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of the heavens, because all his works are true and his ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

Intro Options



Main Point:
God shows grace by humbling the proud.

Option 1

Set five pencils or pens in front of you, all lined up. Tell your students you're thinking of a number from 1 to 10; their job is to figure out what number you're thinking based on what you do with the pencils.

Arrange the pencils in any pattern you wish, but do it in four moves. Let them guess a number, then tell them you were thinking of 4. Make a new a pattern with 8 moves; let them guess, then tell them you were thinking of 8. Keep making new (or repeat) patterns, but the key to the riddle is the number of times you move a pencil. If they have trouble recognizing the pattern, use fewer moves; it's easier to spot when you only move one or two pencils.

Once they've figured out the trick, ask what they originally thought the number was based on (usually the layout of the pencils). Just like the layout of the pencils blinded them to the real key (the number of times you moved the pencils), pride blinds us to the real key in life: God's authority.

Option 2

Your students are to pretend they've been hired by the Medieval Board of Safety to produce posters and pamphlets warning the populace of the danger of riding horses. They should make illustrations to persuade people not to ride horses. For example, they might make posters showing people clonking their heads on tree branches while riding horses, or people running into clotheslines, or people falling off horses and hurting themselves. The more cartoonish and funnier the better.

Let them make and share their posters and pamphlets. Relate the horse to pride. The pamphlets were a joke, but pride is a horse that we ride way too often and with way too much danger. It's actually a gracious thing when God gets us off the high horse of pride because worse things could happen to us if we stayed on the horse. See if your students can think of any examples of how pride hurts us, or how God is gracious to humble us.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Daniel 4:29-30.



Despite voicing praise for the authority of Yahweh (3:28-29), Nebuchadnezzar still idolized himself above all others. After hearing the prophecy of the kingdoms to come after Babylon (2:31-45), the Gentile leader portrayed himself as the world's final authority by constructing a statue covered entirely with gold. Then, in this passage (4:29-30), Nebuchadnezzar looked out over the magnificence of Babylon and felt great conceit. Remarkably, his outlandish swagger came on the heels of a dream about his downfall (4:4-17). Daniel not only interpreted the details of the vision for the king, but he even pleaded for Nebuchadnezzar's repentance while doing so (4:19-27). Yet, despite the warning that God would humble him like an animal because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar continued to strut through Babylon. He saw the kingdom as the work of his hands for the glory of his own name.

▪ When have past successes inflated your ego?

Equally offensive to the Lord was the notion that Nebuchadnezzar determined his own fate. The presumptuous assertion that Babylon would last forever and that no kingdoms would follow was perhaps the worst evidence of the king's ego. Nothing wrongly assumes God's authority like our audacious efforts to control the future.

▪ In what ways do you take the future for granted, as if it is yours to plan?

Sadly, it is possible to live a lifetime with no awareness of God's authority over or role in our existence. Unless we humble ourselves, we will remain oblivious to His activity around us. In this scenario, we become our own god even if we say otherwise. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we have a form of godliness while denying its power (2 Tim. 3:5). Ultimately, our overconfidence regarding the future is the direct result of an exaggerated view of ourselves. Those who think highly of themselves dismiss that life is a vapor that appears briefly before vanishing, as if they are somehow the exception to the rule.

Read Daniel 4:31-33.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 16, DDG)

God is Transcendent

God's transcendence refers to the fact that He is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His greatness and power as well as His goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity; His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). When God saves us, He restores us so we can fulfill our human purpose; this does not mean that we become God or that distinctions between God and humanity are obliterated. Understanding God's transcendence evokes awe and wonder at His goodness and power.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God shows grace by humbling the proud.

Daniel 4

29-30. “Nebuchadnezzar had no less than three palaces in the city of Babylon. He was walking on the roof of one of them when he was overcome with the glory of the city and was consumed with pride. In his exclamation Is this not Babylon the Great that I (lit. ‘I, myself’) have built ... by my vast power and for my majestic glory?, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed himself the source of majesty. He failed to give God the credit and glory as the ultimate giver of all good gifts. Many years later, the apostle Paul scolded the Corinthians for their pride by asking, ‘What do you have that you didn’t receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn’t received it?’ (1 Cor. 4:7).”¹


30. “Archeologists have shown us that Nebuchadnezzar was not simply full of hot air. He had indeed transformed Babylon into the greatest city of the ancient world. Even today, its ruins spread over two thousand acres to form the largest archeological site from ancient Mesopotamia. . . . The city had magnificent walls with eight great gates. The entrances were bedecked in vivid colors—bright red, white, and blue. Great avenues sixty-five feet wide led up to these gates. Nebuchadnezzar built tall temples, perhaps as many as fifty, and some of them of them were probably three hundred feet high! He also built a magnificent new palace, which included a museum for antiquities (this is the sixth century B.C.!) and the famous hanging gardens of Babylon. All of these were Nebuchadnezzar’s work.”²

In Defense (p. 18, DDG)



“Nebuchadnezzar may have suffered from boanthropy, a rare mental illness in which people believe they are actually cattle. One modern case of boanthropy resulted in the patient growing long matted hair and thickened fingernails, much like Nebuchadnezzar, whose hair grew like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. Critics contend that secular history has no record of Nebuchadnezzar’s mental illness. However, it is questionable as to whether an ancient Near Eastern despot would mention his bout with insanity in official court records which were typically devoted to highlighting his accomplishments. Silence about an embarrassing episode is understandable. Moreover, the church historian Eusebius cited Abydenus, a third-century BC Greek historian who referred to a time when Nebuchadnezzar was ‘possessed by a god.’ Also, the third-century BC historian Berosus possibly referred to these events when he spoke of an illness that befell Nebuchadnezzar just before his death.”³

TEACHING PLAN

Our temptation is to read these words as an act of judgment brought about by God's anger toward Nebuchadnezzar. Though the king was deserving of the harshest consequence, the Lord's solution to humble him is more accurately seen as an act of compassion. Jesus taught us that there is no profit in gaining the whole world at the expense of our souls (Mark 8:36). Yet, strangely, we look at Nebuchadnezzar with pity because God stripped him of all worldly value in order to give him what mattered most. If the Lord's methods seem too severe, it likely indicates our failure to grasp the consequences of living for ourselves. 

In His mercy, God offered the misguided leader a final opportunity to know Him and experience His blessings. By forcing Nebuchadnezzar to roam the earth like a wild animal, the Lord invited him toward repentance. Rather than condemn the king for his arrogance, God graciously reduced him to nothing in order to change his ways.

▪ How do you tend to respond to God's interruptions in your life?

anger

annoyance


tolerance

humble receptivity




Read Daniel 4:34-37.



After seven long years as a disgraced member of the animal kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar was finally ready to acknowledge God's sovereign authority over his life. With his once prideful heart and mind now illuminated by truth, the king could not help but praise the God who was so patient with him. Realizing that Yahweh had unlimited authority, Babylon's once fearless leader now feared the one true God. As Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God's power (v. 34) and strength (v. 35), he also recognized how small he was in comparison. When the king finally considered himself as nothing, God lifted his burden and restored his reign over Babylon the moment praise filled his lips. 

Once Nebuchadnezzar experienced the corrective force of God's sovereignty, his lips and heart overflowed with worship. He "praised," "honored," and "glorified" the living God of heaven and earth (4:37). Take a moment to appreciate the dramatic transformation this was. The humbled power broker, who previously worked tirelessly to build his kingdom, now felt privileged simply to extol the God who has no rival. As magnificent as his empire was, Nebuchadnezzar realized how fortunate He was to be included in God's kingdom.

▪ How does having humility before God help us to realize our place and purpose in life?

The stark contrast between Babylon and the kingdom of God could not be more significant. Nebuchadnezzar forced his subjects to serve him in order to prove his distinction. Jesus did not promote His equality with God but, instead, became the servant of all men (Phil. 4:7). Nebuchadnezzar demanded honor by means of his strength. Jesus humbled Himself before God and the Father exalted Him (Phil 4:8-9). Nebuchadnezzar promoted those who were the distinguished in his kingdom. Jesus insisted that the meek, or the least among us, would actually be the greatest (Luke 9:48). The transformation of such a wicked king was truly miraculous. Nebuchadnezzar did not deserve God's intervention in his life to remove his own pride—and neither do we. 

▪ How does the humility of Christ challenge our prideful hearts?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God shows grace by
humbling the proud.

Daniel 4

31. “While the boastful words were still coming out of the king’s mouth, a voice from heaven pronounced judgment upon him. Evidently this was an audible announcement (at least to the king). The voice, probably of an angel, declared that heaven had ‘decreed’ his judgment. It was as good as done. Nebuchadnezzar would live with the wild animals and eat grass like the cattle for seven years (‘seven times’) until he finally repented of his pride and gave glory to God. Immediately the horrible sentence was carried out. Nebuchadnezzar fell under the strange delusion and began to act like an animal. Because of this bizarre behavior, he ‘was driven away from people.’ He lived outdoors with the beasts, ‘ate grass like cattle,’ and was exposed to the weather (‘drenched with the dew’). The king’s ‘hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.’ ... How ironic that the king who felt himself superior to other men had now sunk to a subhuman level.”⁴

34. “Nebuchadnezzar certainly had an encounter with the living God, and his praise seems sincere. Was this experience equivalent to salvation, or did it fall short of saving faith? Wood, Young, Luck, Rushdoony, and Walvoord believe that the king had a genuine salvation experience; but others, including Calvin, Keil, Pusey, and Archer, think that the king’s faith fell short. One cannot be dogmatic, but the language of the text suggests that Nebuchadnezzar did in fact have a saving encounter with the true God.”⁵

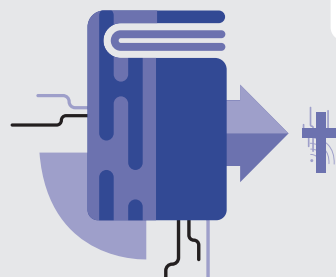
Activity

Split students up into several groups to make skits. Each group should come up with a scene of someone (or multiple people) being prideful about something (their athleticism, their looks, their possessions). However, each group should also be ready: when you wave your magic wand and say, “Shazoom!” the skit changes: instead of manifesting pride in something, the skit changes to the person (or people) praising God about whatever they were formerly prideful about.

Let them prepare the skits, and then perform them, with you “shazooming” their skits along the way. Afterward, debrief: in particular, point out the connection between humility and praising God. Did anyone, as part of their praising God, use what was once a source of pride as a means to love or serve others?

(p. 17, DDG) Christ Connection

King Nebuchadnezzar boasted in the city he had built to bring glory to himself, but God humbled him so he could see the glory of the King of heaven. Jesus is the King of kings who humbled Himself by taking on the flesh and laying down His life to build a people of God for the Father’s glory.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



Why do you think our culture seems to support and value pride?

Why do you think God has designed the world in such a way that the humble will be exalted and the proud will be brought low?

Heart



What are some behaviors and actions that point to a prideful heart? Do you see any of these in yourself?

What are some behaviors and actions that point to a humble heart? Do you see any of these in yourself?

Hands



How does Jesus' humility serve as a model for our own?

What are some ways we can imitate Jesus' example of humility in our own lives?

Main Point: **God shows grace by humbling the proud.**



Head

Without humility, we might read this passage like the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray just to thank God that he was not as sinful as those around him (Luke 18:11). Instead, when we read about Nebuchadnezzar, we should recognize our pride and humble ourselves as a result.

Of course, as with Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord is not eager for us to perish but would desire for our repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). In fact, according to this account, our heavenly Father is aggressively patient as He actively shows kindness to us. In the end, His efforts to bring us low demonstrates His passion to lift us high as His own. While counterintuitive for most people, the door posts of humility and repentance mark the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Our humiliation, wrought either by self-awareness or divine disclosure, will always precede our exaltation.



Heart

Pride blinds us to God's final authority over our lives. We celebrate our achievements, forgetting that every good and perfect gift is from above (Jas. 1:17). Puffing ourselves up is a practical denial that salvation is a gift that leaves no room for boasting (Eph. 2:8-9) and that God has different assignments for every member of His family (Rom. 12:3-8). Rather than see our blessings as from Him and through Him and to Him (Rom. 11:36), we blindly hoard Christ's glory for ourselves. Promoting our agenda leaves us valuing the gifts of heaven more than the Lord who gave them. Because of all these things, pride is first and foremost an issue of the heart. Only the heart that is set on the loving affection for God will fight against pride, whereas the heart set on itself will accept the false pretense that it is in control.



Hands

In addition to being the fountainhead of most sinful acts, pride also prevents us from appreciating the full beauty of Christ's character and work. Jesus emptied Himself, became a servant, and was obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:7-8). Before receiving a name that is above all other names, He depended entirely upon the will of His Father. Forfeiting His riches (2 Cor. 8:9), temporarily undergoing the judgment of God (Mark 15:34), and tasting death for every man (Heb. 2:9) were just a few sacrifices endured by Jesus out of His humility.

Consider the multiplicity of commands instructing us to emulate the example of Christ's meekness: we are to want (Micah 6:8), wear (Col. 3:12), and walk in humility (Eph. 4:1-2). After a dispute broke out among His disciples about who would be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus warned that the least among us is the greatest in order to reinforce the significance of servant leadership (Luke 22:25-27). These few examples remind us that we can never sincerely treasure Christ nor become like Him unless God graciously humbles us.