God’s Word to You

Hope in the Midst of Darkness

God’s plan to redeem humanity centered on Him forming a people through whom He would bring blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3). It would be through this people—the descendants of Abraham—that One would come to crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and put an end to sin and death. Not only would God’s blessing come through the Israelites, it would be extended to them. God had promised to care for His people, to protect them, and to be their God and their Father.

But one of the ways good fathers bless is by disciplining their wayward, disobedient children. Just as God had promised to take care of Israel many times, He had also warned them of the consequences of their disobedience. But they failed to listen. Time and time again, they played the harlot with pagan gods, wanting the faithful blessings of the one true God without being faithful to Him.

God’s response is found in the prophets and can be summarized by one word: Repent. God called on His people to turn from their wicked ways and turn back to Him. If they did, He would receive them back, but if they did not, He would bring destruction upon them—not punitive destruction but restorative destruction. His discipline is always corrective.

And still, the people would not listen, they would not repent. So judgment came. First, it came in the form of the Assyrian army, which conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and hauled off its people into captivity. But even witnessing this did not draw the rest of God’s people to repentance. And so, judgment came again, this time through the Babylonian army, which destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, and exiled its people.

These were dark days for God’s people. They were prisoners in foreign lands, their land was occupied by a pagan people, and the temple lay in ruins. The blessings of God seemed more distant than ever. Impossible even. But even if it was difficult for the people to see, God was drawing His master plan together—the promised Seed, the Deliverer, was closer than ever. In a blistering cadence of activity to close out the Old Testament, God restored His people to the promised land and the temple and the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt, but then God went silent. For four hundred years, the people looked, listened, and waited—the stage was set for Jesus to come and crush the serpent’s head.
Unit 16: God Sustains His People (Daniel)

December 1  6  Session 1  God’s Presence Sustains His People
December 8  18  Session 2  God’s Authority Sustains His People
December 15  30  Session 3  God’s Protection Sustains His People
December 22  42  Christmas  Immanuel, God with Us
December 29  54  Session 4  God’s Promises Sustain His People

Unit 17: God Restores His People (Ezra; Prophets)

January 5  66  Session 1  The Vision of Future Justice
January 12  78  Session 2  The Return of Exiles
January 19  90  Session 3  The Rebuilding of the Temple
January 26  102  Session 4  The Promise of a Coming King

Unit 18: God Prepares His People (Esther, Nehemiah, Malachi)

February 2  114  Session 1  God Saves His People Through a Queen
February 9  126  Session 2  God Protects His People Through a Cupbearer
February 16  138  Session 3  God Revives His People Through a Scribe
February 23  150  Session 4  God’s Warns His People Through a Prophet

Cover Art Explanation
1. A heavenly being, likely the pre-incarnate Son of God, appeared in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Unit 16, Session 1)
2. One like a son of man—the Messiah—ascends to the Ancient of Days on the clouds of heaven (Unit 16, Session 4)
3. Priests with trumpets led the celebration of the foundation being laid for the new temple being built in Jerusalem (Unit 17, Session 2)
4. The branch is a prophetic image of the coming Messiah (Unit 17, Session 4)
5. Ezra read God’s law from a scroll before all the people as a renewal of the covenant in light of the Lord having restored the Jews to the promised land (Unit 18, Session 3)
A Word from the Editor

Brian Dembowczyk
Managing Editor—The Gospel Project
Author of Gospel-Centered Kids Ministry and Cornerstones: 200 Questions and Answers to Learn Truth

Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world’s view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ’s power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God’s faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.
Quina Aragon (Christmas session) is an author and spoken word artist who resides in Tampa, Florida, with her husband, Jon, and three-year-old daughter. She is a small group leader at her church. Her first children’s book, *Love Made*, poetically retells the story of creation through a trinitarian lens of overflowing joy and love.

Aaron Armstrong (unit 17, session 1) is the brand manager of *The Gospel Project*, author of several books, including *Awaiting a Savior* and *Epic: The Story That Changed the World*, and screenwriter of the award-winning documentary *Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer*. Find him online at bloggingtheologically.com and on Twitter at @aaronstrongarm.

Adam Dooley (unit 16, sessions 1-4) serves as the senior pastor of Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee. He is a two-time graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also serves as an adjunct professor. Adam is the author of *Passion in the Pulpit* and the forthcoming *When Life Unravels* (June 2020). He and his wife, Heather, have three sons and two daughters.

Micah Fries (unit 17, sessions 2-4) is the senior pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Micah has authored and edited multiple books, including a volume in the *Christ-Centered Exposition* commentary series, *Islam and North America*, and *Leveling the Church* (releasing Spring 2020). Micah is married to Tracy and has two daughters, Grace and Kessed, and a son, Haddon.

Muche Ukegbu (unit 18, sessions 1-4) is the lead pastor at The Brook Church in Miami, Florida, a church he and his wife, Diamone, helped to plant in 2015 in association with the North American Mission Board. He received a BA in Anthropology from the University of North Texas and an MA in Christian Leadership from Dallas Theological Seminary. The Ukegbus have three children.
God’s Presence Sustains His People

Summary and Goal
Though leaders come and go, God remains. This session extols God’s unlimited power and goodness while reminding us that our faith glorifies His name. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, along with Daniel, grew in their commitment to Yahweh despite their harsh surroundings (1:8-21). After Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (2:31-45), these men oversaw Babylonian affairs under the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When commanded to worship the king’s golden image, these faithful servants refused. Through their unwavering resolve, we learn that our God is always with us and that He glories in our faith.

Session Outline
1. God’s people have faith that He is all-powerful, sovereign, and good (Dan. 3:13-18).
2. God’s presence is with His people at their time of greatest need (Dan. 3:24-27).
3. God’s glory is made known through the faith of His people (Dan. 3:28-30).

Background Passage: Daniel 1–3

Session in a Sentence
God is present with His people and sustains them through trials so that He may be glorified through their faith.

Christ Connection
The same God who was all-powerful, faithful, and present with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the flames will also deliver us through His Son, who is with us in the fiery trials of life and who saves us from the punishment for our sin.

Missional Application
Because we have confidence that God is with us, we trust in God’s power as we embrace a countercultural lifestyle, regardless of what the immediate outcome may be.
EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph on page 11 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) to recount the writer’s experience of crisis with his young son’s cancer diagnosis and how this experience deepened his family’s faith.

What is the worst crisis you have ever faced? For me, it was my son’s cancer diagnosis just two weeks shy of his fourth birthday. When the doctor said, “Leukemia,” my wife and I instantly froze in fear. In that moment, God seemed distant, and even uncaring. Little did we know, however, that the next three years would deepen our faith and broaden our awareness of God’s presence in our lives.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

When have harsh realities in your life left you feeling as if God were distant and uncaring? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 11) to highlight the blessing of God’s presence during our trials, regardless of their outcome.

Sometimes God delivers His people out of their trials. After one hundred twenty-eight weeks of chemotherapy, today our son is cancer free and thriving. We praise the Lord for His gracious, healing touch that took our burden away. Even more importantly, however, we learned that God sustains us throughout our suffering regardless of its outcome. The lengthy duration of our family’s trial left us living in limbo for years before relief came. With no resolution in sight, God taught us that He is not only present when His people hurt but He is also enough. Having God in our lives is better than just having the results we desire.

SUMMARIZE: Though circumstances come and go, God remains. This session extols God’s unlimited power and goodness while reminding us that our faith glorifies His name. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, along with Daniel, grew in their commitment to Yahweh despite their harsh surroundings (1:8-21). After Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (2:31-45), these men oversaw Babylonian affairs under the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When commanded to worship the king’s golden image, these faithful servants refused. Through their unwavering resolve, we learn that our God is always with us and that He glories in our faith.

For session-by-session training videos, please visit MinistryGrid.com/GospelProject.
For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
Point 1: God’s people have faith that He is all-powerful, sovereign, and good (Dan. 3:13-18).


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.”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 12) to describe the idolatrous temptation Nebuchadnezzar put before the Israelite exiles, and explain the importance of faith when facing temptation.

Life in Babylon was difficult for God’s exiles. In that land, narcissistic Nebuchadnezzar erected a pagan statue to his unrivaled authority, and that idol served as a test of the loyalty of the king’s subjects. “Bow or burn,” he said. Obviously, no dedicated follower of Yahweh could obey this idolatrous edict, regardless of the cost.

- Doubting the character and strength of God is at the root of every temptation and sin. Every disobedient shortcut reveals our lack of assurance that the Lord can and will do what He promises. In the garden of Eden, Satan questioned the motive behind God’s one food restriction and dismissed the Creator’s power to enforce His law. Because Adam and Eve lost confidence in their Maker’s goodness and authority, they succumbed to the serpent’s seduction (Gen. 3:1-7). Our transgressions follow a similar pattern. On the other hand, when we understand and believe that God is powerful and good, we find the courage to trust Him despite life’s burdens, distractions, and enticements.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

In what ways does our culture tempt us to compromise our faith? (we are challenged to follow the lead of the culture instead of the truth of God's Word; rejecting the ideals of the culture likely will result in ridicule and even rejection of you; it is considered taboo to share the gospel and to call out sin from a biblical perspective)
PACK ITEM 4: LEAVE THE HELM: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 12) to establish that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego acted boldly on the belief the God could save them, not the certainty that He would. Then use the Theodoret of Cyr quote on this poster and the leader content below to apply their faithful example to the lives of your group members.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image, communicating their profound faith in God’s sovereignty over and goodness in their lives. Though these men knew God could deliver them, their course of action was not dependent upon the certainty of what their Master chose to do. Foundational to their profound display of faith was the conviction that God is always working for the good of His children, even if it is not obvious how.

Application: Affirming with words that God is powerful, sovereign, and good is not difficult, but living according to this belief is often challenging. Knowing God has a perfect plan will not necessarily lessen the pain or frustration we feel when hardships interrupt the rhythm of our lives. The question at hand is not whether these incidents will arise but how we will respond when they do. Ultimately, our view of God sets the tone for our hope in every crisis, our strength in every temptation, and our courage against all hostilities. The profound conviction that God was working for their good prevented Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from despairing even as death taunted them. It will do the same for us.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 12).

Faith: Genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel, followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one’s life. Biblical faith is not blind faith.

Essential Doctrine “Faith”: Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one’s life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
Point 2: God’s presence is with His people at their time of greatest need (Dan. 3:24-27).

SAY: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image, provoking his fierce wrath. After ordering the heat of his furnace increased, the impulsive dictator had the three Hebrew men tied up and tossed into the fire. Even the Babylonian guards carrying out the king’s command died from the excessive heat (3:19-23). The death of God’s faithful servants seemed certain as they fell into the inferno.


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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 13) to show how God protected and delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego during their time of fiery trial. Make sure to explain that all scenarios do not end with a miraculous conclusion; sometimes the Lord allows the suffering to remain for our good.

God powerfully brought these men out of their plight. When the Lord carries us through our adversities, whether by miraculous or ordinary means, His presence with us is undeniable. The records and experiences of God’s presence through trials remind us that never will we experience the coming storm of God’s judgment. Because of Christ’s sacrificial work on the cross, the fires of God’s wrath will never consume us.

- All scenarios do not have the same conclusion found here. Sometimes God heals and preserves; sometimes suffering remains for a lifetime, whether long or short. He may seem distant, and even negligent, in the present. Yet whether we sense His presence with us or not, God has said that never will He abandon or forsake His children (Heb. 13:5).

- In God’s omniscience, He knows whether or not relief from suffering is our greatest need, and God is committed to giving us what we need to bring us closer to Him. The Lord’s hand may not be apparent to us now, but He is always working for our good (Rom. 8:28), and we understand that God will make all things new one day.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How has God’s presence changed your outlook on trials, even when your circumstances remained the same? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 13) to highlight how the fourth figure in the fire provided comfort to the Hebrew exiles and also to us today. Extend God’s comfort to your group members with God’s promises from Scripture that are referenced below. And use the commentary below, if needed, to raise the idea that the fourth figure in the fire may have been a pre-incarnate appearance of the Christ, the Son of God.

The presence of a fourth man in the fire is a vivid reminder that God is present to comfort us on our most difficult days (see Isa. 43:1-3; 2 Cor. 1:3-5). Before the Lord delivered these men out of the fire, He chose to be with them in the fire. God does not always remove our troubles, but He remains active in them nonetheless. He refuses to forsake us when the path of difficulty is His chosen course for our lives. Had these three Jewish heroes remained in the fire to perish on that day, God would have stayed with them until the end.

• Our Savior will minister to us while the world around us is falling apart. Not only does He bear our burdens for us (Matt. 11:28), He also promises that no tribulation or trial can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35-39). He gives us peace that surpasses understanding when we call out to Him in prayer (Phil. 4:6-7). When the pain is so deep that we cannot express it with words, the Holy Spirit offers groanings to the Father on our behalf as He intercedes for us according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27). We are never defenseless to the changing circumstances of a fallen world because of God’s enduring presence.

Commentary: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were joined in the fire by a fourth individual, who had the appearance of a divine being like a son of the gods, who was either a Christophany (a physical appearance of Christ before his incarnation) or an angel (see v. 28). In either case, this is a physical demonstration of God’s presence with believers in their distress, a graphic fulfillment of the Lord’s promise in Isaiah 43:2. The Lord promised his presence with his people, ensuring that their trials and difficulties would not utterly overwhelm them.”

© 2019 LifeWay Christian Resources
Point 3: God’s glory is made known through the faith of His people (Dan. 3:28-30).


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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 14) to show how the three Hebrew men’s willingness to die magnified the power and beauty of the one true God.

When Nebuchadnezzar observed the miraculous result of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s ironclad commitment to Yahweh, even to death, he could not ignore the majestic power and beauty of the true God. His decree gave testimony to the strength of Israel’s God, even though Babylon’s king remained thoroughly pagan. This incident underscores the profound witness the faith of God’s people can have on those around them. Our lives should always communicate that Christ is strong, good, and holy.

- In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus not only defined the nature of good works from God’s perspective, He also revealed an end goal of our obedience: that unbelievers would see our good works and glorify our Father who is heaven (Matt. 5:16). In a similar way, the unwavering faith of a believer who is suffering also reveals the glory of God to those outside of the faith. The moment following Christ becomes costly, non-Christians will take notice.

- Every trial we face is a battleground for proving that our Savior is glorious both because of what He has done and because of who He is. Faithfulness to the Lord in the midst of struggle boldly declares that our relationship with Christ is a treasure without equal. No earthly frustration, even the threat of death, should dismantle our belief that Christ is the only reward we need.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

When have you witnessed God’s glory revealed through the faithful suffering of others? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 14) to show how the Hebrews’ faith led to reverence for God, even among the nations. Then apply this to your group members’ lives of faith in sharing the gospel.

The salvation of these men from the fire further amplified the worship of the true God. In their day, Gentiles from every people, nation, and language were to refrain from dishonoring Yahweh, who delivered His people like no false deity could. But one day, and even now, the nations will gather around the eternal throne of Jesus and take great joy in glorifying God’s sacrificial Lamb for the salvation He provided through the cross (Rev. 7:9-10).

- Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prospered for trusting in God’s provision, so too will all believers who gather with their Savior in the new Jerusalem, having been saved from the fire of His judgment (Rev. 21:7; 22:1-5).

Application: One day our faith will become sight at Jesus’ second coming, but we should have no less enthusiasm for glorifying Christ today for the salvation He provides now. In fact, our joy for lifting up the Savior in our words and actions supports our efforts in sharing the gospel. We should not underestimate the persuasive power of a changed life as it points others to Christ. Those who reject our gospel cannot deny its impact when a person truly passes from death to life, from the drudgery of sin to the joy of obedience. Our acts of faith reveal the Lord’s glory so that others might see it and promote it as well. God’s grace for sinners as revealed in the person and work of Christ, borne out in the life of a believer, unveils His glory like nothing else (John 1:14).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some ways our faith in Jesus can result in praise to God among the nations? (we are willing to risk sharing the gospel with others so they may believe in Jesus; faith in the midst of difficult times shows others the supremacy of Christ in our lives; believing in Christ compels us to give and go that the nations may hear the gospel and believe; our faith gives opportunity for God to display His glory in our faithful endurance and His miraculous provision)
EXPLAIN: The salvation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego vividly illustrates God’s presence with us as we endure life’s trials. The Lord is not distant to or calloused by our pain. He comforts, sustains, and guides us through the worst possible scenarios. As the world becomes increasingly wicked, we must be willing to face the consequences for holy living without hesitation. As long as the Lord is with us, whom should we fear (Ps. 27:1)? Regardless of the outcomes produced by our earthly troubles, we know that the fire of God’s judgment will never touch us because of the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross. So we can endure temporary heartaches in the life of faith while on mission for the gospel of Christ knowing that God will one day make all things new through His Son. When sin no longer hinders us, we will enjoy God’s presence more fully even as we reign over all that He created (2 Tim. 2:12). Unsinged by the smoky conditions of our past, the future glory revealed in us will make every sacrifice worthwhile.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 15), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have confidence that God is with us, we trust in God’s power as we embrace a countercultural lifestyle, regardless of what the immediate outcome may be.

- How do you need to live by faith in God, trusting that He will work for your good and not your harm?
- What are some ways your group/church can live a countercultural lifestyle for the sake of the gospel?
- What circumstances in your life, either past or present, can you use to point others to Christ?

Voices from the Church

“God has different purposes for His own, and He shows Himself strong and gains glory in different ways throughout each of our lifetimes. And if He allows suffering in our lives, He does for very specific, very important reasons, and He does not do so lightly!”

—Joni Eareckson Tada

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You promise never to leave nor forsake Your people. Thank You for how You make Yourself present to us in Your Son, Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit, who resides with us and in us. Help us to trust in You despite whatever the temporary consequences may be as we take the gospel to a world that is hostile to Your goodness and truth. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 16-18), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 19) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 16-18) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 19) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 16-18) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 5 as a part of point 3 in the session: Oftentimes, the miraculous intervention of God in our lives while we hurt compels others to praise Him.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3:** “Harsh circumstances should not limit our willingness to obey the Lord.”
- **Day 4:** “God is with us in the fire even if He does not allow us to come out of it.”

Visit [www.GospelProject.com/Blog](http://www.GospelProject.com/Blog) for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 19) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to find ways to hold one another accountable to live mindfully of God’s presence during good times and bad.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1:** God’s people have faith that He is all-powerful, sovereign, and good (Dan. 3:13-18).

“The Bible depicts Nebuchadnezzar as the evil king that destroyed Jerusalem and God’s temple; but this position is mitigated somewhat by the conviction that he, and Babylon, were God’s chosen instruments of punishment on a wayward Judah (Jer. 25:9). In the Book of Daniel, we find a more human Nebuchadnezzar playing the role of pagan despot, stubborn in his own power, but helpless before the God of Israel, and somewhat repentant in response. Daniel’s Nebuchadnezzar serves as an example and a warning to all men of power—appropriate for all times, including today.”

“The three Jews knew very well that bowing down to the image would break the first two of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-6), and they remain unshaken in their resolve to obey the Lord alone. Their response sounds quite defiant: ‘we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter’ (3:16-17). But read properly, it becomes evident that they are replying to Nebuchadnezzar’s question. In effect they are saying that they do not need to verbally defend God. Nebuchadnezzar has questioned God’s power, and God is capable of answering even this daunting challenging. But even if God chooses not to rescue his people, they will trust him alone and not worship the Babylonian gods, the statue or anything it represents (3:18). This statement is not evidence of a lack of faith in their God’s power to save them. Rather it shows submission to God’s sovereignty by allowing for the fact that God in his mysterious wisdom may choose not to rescue them. This is a risk they are willing to take. They would rather obey God and lose their lives than obey human orders that are contrary to God’s.”

**Point 2:** God’s presence is with His people at their time of greatest need (Dan. 3:24-27).

“The flames from the superheated furnace killed the men who took the three Jews to it, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not killed. Instead, when Nebuchadnezzar peered into the furnace, he saw them walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed. And he also saw a fourth person who looked ‘like a son of the gods’ (Dan. 3:25). It is not difficult to know who that fourth person was. He was Jesus Christ in a preincarnate form—perhaps the form he had when he appeared to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or in which he wrestled with Jacob beside the brook Jabbok.”
“What impressed Nebuchadnezzar most of all was that now the three Jews had been joined by a fourth man, and this one looked like ‘a son of the gods.’ Porteous and the majority of Jewish scholars have identified this person as an angel … However, the expression ‘a son of the gods’ ascribes deity to the being, since an offspring of the gods partakes of the divine nature … The NRSV’s ‘the appearance of a god’ seems to capture the idea well, for the king believed that he had seen no less than a god in the flames with the three Hebrews … The translation of the NIV and most modern versions is to be preferred, since Nebuchadnezzar was polytheistic and had no conception of the Christian Trinity. Thus the pagan king only meant that the fourth figure in the fire was divine. From the Christian perspective, we know that the preincarnate Christ did appear to individuals in the Old Testament. Most likely the fourth man in the fire was the angel of the Lord, God himself in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, a view held by many expositors. It is certainly true that when believers go through fiery trials Christ is with them. The three Hebrews experienced literally the promise, ‘When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze’ (Isa. 43:2).”

**Point 3:** God’s glory is made known through the faith of His people (Dan. 3:28-30).

“Nebuchadnezzar was awestruck as he called out to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, addressing them as servants of the Most High God (3:26). He had encountered this God as a ‘revealer of mysteries’ before (2:47), but now he encountered him as a deliverer (3:28-29). Unfortunately Nebuchadnezzar did not embrace this God for himself. He merely declared that this God was unique in being able to save his servants and forbade any insults to him on pain of death. The three Hebrew lads had earned the king’s respect and he promoted them (3:30). Interestingly, after the miracle they neither reprimanded the king nor bragged about their faith, as many would do today. It was the Lord’s battle to start with, and the Lord’s opponent, Nebuchadnezzar, had admitted defeat. What more could be said? We hear nothing more of these men in the rest of the book.”

“Nebuchadnezzar’s decree served to legitimize Jewish monotheism, but it did not eliminate polytheism. Despite receiving revelation through a miraculous deliverance, Nebuchadnezzar failed to acknowledge the exclusivity of the God of the Hebrews.”

References
WHAT’S NEXT?

Fall 2018  **In the Beginning**  
Creation and the Fall (Genesis; Job)  
God Establishes a Covenant People (Genesis)  
God Grows His Covenant People (Genesis)

Winter 2018-19  **Out of Egypt**  
God Redeems His People (Genesis; Exodus)  
God Provides for His People (Exodus)  
God Receives Worship from His People (Exodus; Leviticus)

Spring 2019  **Into the Promised Land**  
God Guides His People (Numbers; Deuteronomy)  
God Gives His People a Home (Joshua)  
God Delivers His People (Judges; Ruth)

Summer 2019  **A Kingdom Provided**  
God Provides a King (1 Samuel)  
God Provides a Godly King (1–2 Samuel; Psalms)  
God Provides a Wise King (1 Kings; Ecclesiastes)

Fall 2019  **A Nation Divided**  
God Speaks to His People (1–2 Kings)  
God Judges the Sin of His People (2 Kings; Prophets)  
God Shows Mercy to His People (2 Chronicles; Prophets)

Winter 2019-20  **A People Restored**  
God Sustains His People (Daniel)  
God Restores His People (Ezra; Prophets)  
God Prepares His People (Nehemiah; Esther; Malachi)

Spring 2020  **Jesus the Messiah**  
Jesus Comes into the World (Luke)  
Jesus Begins His Ministry (Gospels)  
Jesus Among the People (Gospels)

Summer 2020  **Jesus the Servant**  
Jesus the Healer (Gospels)  
Jesus the Teacher (Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

Fall 2020  **Jesus the Savior**  
Jesus and the Kingdom (Gospels)  
Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King (Gospels)

Winter 2020-21  **The Mission Begins**  
The Holy Spirit Comes (Acts; Epistles)  
Fundamentals of the Faith (Acts; Epistles)  
New Life in Christ (Acts; Epistles)

Spring 2021  **The Church United**  
Living Like Jesus (Acts; Hebrews)  
The Sent Church (Acts; Epistles)  
Don’t Forget (Acts; Epistles)

Summer 2021  **All Things New**  
Paul in Prison (Acts; Epistles)  
Facing Adversity (Acts; Epistles)  
Jesus Will Come Again (Revelation)
“I am a Gospel Project” is a simple reminder to the world that you are a work in progress. But it’s also a subtle message that we are all in need of a Savior.

It certainly can start a conversation, creating an easy way to point people to your church, your Bible study group, and the One at the center of it all.

This shirt also makes a great gift for your group leader or others who help around church.

Supplies are limited, so get yours before it’s gone. Learn more online or call 800.458.2772.

lifeway.com/tshirt

Price and availability subject to change without notice.
Coming Up Next
New Studies for Spring 2020

Want to use The Gospel Project with other age groups?

Twitter: @Gospel_Project   Facebook: TheGospelProject    Instagram: GospelProject_

CHECK OUT THESE ADDITIONAL STUDY OPTIONS FOR ANY OTHER TIME YOU NEED A BIBLE STUDY.

Holy Vocabulary: Unpacking the Language of Faith by Jordan Easley
Resurrection: The Foundation of Our Faith by Mary Jo Sharp
Dealing with Messy Relationships by Ben Mandrell

Scripture: The Book of Romans
LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible

Create your own Bible studies in minutes. Choose from 1,200+ text-based and video-enhanced studies on more than 400 topics from all 66 books of the Bible. Visit the website for a free trial.
SmallGroup.com

VOLUME 7
JESUS THE MESSIAH
Unit 19: Jesus Comes into the World (Luke)
Unit 20: Jesus Begins His Ministry (Gospels)
Unit 21: Jesus Among the People (Gospels)

WRITERS: Matt Boswell, Matt Capps, Dhati Lewis, Katie Orr, Ed Stetzer

© 2019 LifeWay Christian Resources

WINTER 2019-20