



SESSION 1 of 4

The king's dream

MEETING AIM

To explore God's view of our individual lives now and in the future, and also our part in God's story through the ages.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 2

BACKGROUND

The stories in the book of Daniel seem far away from the world of our young people. Many of them might seem like children's stories, but they are full of danger, violence, peer pressure and standing up for what we believe in. This story is no different, but the prophetic nature of Nebuchadnezzar's dream will help them think about how God's plan works through the ages as well as our own place in those plans.

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the group and share out any drinks and snacks you have. Chat about the week the young people have had. Ask if anyone has played a computer game called *Civilization* (or similar), where players start with a Stone Age settlement and develop it through the ages into bustling cities and armies in a bid to take over the world. If so, get them to explain it to the group and describe the different stages, eg how farming, trade and developing technology fit in.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: long sheet of paper (lining paper is ideal); marker pens

Pin the long sheet of paper to the wall and create a timeline of the history of the world. Give the young people marker pens and ask them to populate this timeline with everything they can think of from the beginning of time to now.

Some coordination will be required to space things accordingly, and it will be easiest to start with the most obvious big events, such as Jesus' birth, 1066 and the moon landing (1969), but don't get bogged down with recent events. Use phones or

other devices to research the dates of the Ice Age, when Stonehenge was built and so on. Try to mark at least some key moments from biblical history.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles; timeline from 'Intro activity'; a globe or maps of the ancient world

Read Daniel 2 out loud, stopping whenever necessary to work with the group and mark any dates on the timeline, eg when Daniel was taken to Babylon and the length of time Israel was in exile. Ask them to refer to the timelines at the back of their Bibles.

Explain how many scholars have interpreted the dream. The statue represented four kingdoms to come. Daniel said that Babylon, and specifically Nebuchadnezzar, was the head of gold. Led by Cyrus the Great, Babylon fell to the kingdom of the Medo-Persians in 539 BC, so that was the silver part. The bronze kingdom is the Greek Empire. The Greeks became a unified nation under Alexander the Great in 336 BC and defeated the Medo-Persians in 332 BC. The iron kingdom is the Roman Empire, which begins in 146 BC and lasted 500 years before splitting into east and west.

Work with the group to mark on your timeline the periods of Medo-Persia and the Greek and Roman Empires. Use it to discuss Israel's and our own place in that history of ancient and modern civilisations. It might be helpful to have a globe handy or to print off a few maps showing how much of the known world these empires conquered.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to discuss the Bible passage, making sure everyone gets the chance to contribute:

- Why did God give Nebuchadnezzar a dream, and why didn't the king trust his wise men to interpret?
- How did Daniel know the meaning of the dream?
- What do you think of Nebuchadnezzar's response to Daniel's amazing knowledge?
- Why had God allowed Israel to be taken over by Babylon?
- How does God speak to us?
- What does God know, and what do we not know?
- What does God want us to learn from this story?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: long sheets of paper; felt-tip pens

This activity is similar to 'Intro activity' but is designed to help young people see God at work in their own timelines. Encourage them to find some space on their own. Give each person a metre-long sheet of paper and access to felt-tip pens of different colours.

Ask them to draw a line from left to right and mark off the first half (or maybe two-thirds) into twelve months up to a point that they should label 'NOW'. In the first section (to the left), they should record a few significant moments from world affairs, entertainment and sport news (rough dates are fine).

Now suggest that they add a few key moments from their personal lives, such as their birthday, exam results or relationships starting.

Prompt them to also mark on spiritual moments: times they felt God speaking to them, your youth group weekend away, Soul Survivor or getting baptised, for example.

In the second section (to the right) they should mark on the timeline how they think things will go in the next year or few years. Imagining they are God, able to see everything, even outside of time, encourage them to record their hopes for their lives along with key moments and developments in their spiritual and personal lives.

10 PRAYER

You will need: personal timelines from 'Creative response'

Ask the group to look at their own timelines and try to see the bigger picture of their lives as God sees them. Challenge each young person to summarise God's role in their life, as well as his desires for them and their future in one or two sentences, writing it down on the sheet from God's point of view. Pray as a group and ask them, if they are comfortable, to read out their statements so everyone can hear them.

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SESSION 2 of 4

The fiery furnace

MEETING AIM

To discuss and investigate any similarities and principles from the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that we can apply in our modern context.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 3

BACKGROUND

Nebuchadnezzar seems to be a very paranoid ruler. He constructs a golden statue for people to worship, but he considers anyone who won't do so a potential threat and applies fatal consequences to their rebellion. These must have been difficult circumstances for his people to cope with, let alone foreign immigrants like Daniel and co. What it gives us, however, is an aspirational example of how to conduct ourselves with integrity in a society that looks down on our beliefs: one of the most useful resources the Bible could offer our young people today!

5 GATHERING TOGETHER

Welcome the young people to the group and share out any drinks and snacks you have. Chat about the week the young people have had. Share in their triumphs and disasters, and maybe add a story or two from your own week.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: three tents (or the equipment to build three makeshift shelters: sheets, chairs, pegs etc)

Build three small tents as a group. Arrange them around the outside of your space facing into the middle.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: a room fan; bricks or small logs; flame-coloured ribbons; gaffer tape; camping lights; a Bible

Create a campfire between the tents. Carefully place a fan on the floor facing

upwards. Use a ring of bricks, kindling, logs, scrunched-up newspaper etc to disguise it (and its shaft and cable!). Tie red, yellow and orange strips of ribbon to the grills. Tape down the cable so that no one trips over it.

Gather the young people inside the circle of tents around the campfire. Give some of them a camping lamp and ask them to turn it on. Turn the main light off and the fan on. Sitting around the campfire, take time to stare into the flames. Chat about the mesmerising effect of fire and how it makes them feel.

Comment that much of the Old Testament was passed down orally, before it was all written down in the format we have today. Read Daniel 3 to the group. Go back to the fire and discuss how hot and impressive Nebuchadnezzar's fire must have been.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to discuss the Bible passage, making sure everyone gets the chance to contribute:

- What similarities are there between Babylon's and our society?
- Have you ever had to sacrifice anything for your faith – even something small?
- Do your friends know you are a Christian?
- Our government doesn't threaten to throw us into a fire for our faith, but are there any ways in which we are exiles from the kingdom of God, living in a society that largely doesn't know, understand or worship him?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: Post-it notes in yellow, red or orange; scissors; reflective music and the means to play it

Give the young people time to reflect. Tell them to turn the Post-its upside down so the sticky bit is at the bottom, and then cut the top into the shape of flames. On each note, write words that describe the pressures on their faith: things that tempt them away from the beliefs and behaviour they ascribe to, or idols they feel pressured to worship, such as playing Sunday morning football instead of going to church; indulging in drinking, smoking or other things; listening to music with dodgy lyrics or videos; playing violent video games; or confusion about theology or alternative philosophies. They could discuss these issues in pairs or groups or respond individually. These Post-its should be stuck all around the campfire and across the floor.

Discuss Jesus walking in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Jesus is with us through all these pressures, hardships and temptations. Imagine him

here now by the fire. Create an atmosphere of worship. Put on some music and encourage the young people to walk around the campfire, deliberately treading on the Post-it 'flames'. Ask them to quietly list things they are grateful to God for and to use their fingers to mark each one off. This should help focus their minds on how many things we have to be grateful for. Give them five minutes or so and challenge them to see if anyone can get to a hundred things in that time!

5 PRAYER

You will need: three prayer stations set up as described below, one in each of the tents

Tent one: decorate the tent with a red drape or rug, and scraps of flame-coloured paper. Place some white paper inside for the young people to write confessions, sins and prayers of penitence on. If they want to they can throw these confessions onto the campfire once they have done business with God.

Tent two: decorate the tent with a white drape, rug or cloth. In here they should ask God to help them live a life that is worthy of him and his calling. Print off a few aspirational quotes, verses, positive words and the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and stick them around the inside of the tent. Encourage the young people to pray that they will have an impact on their society and communities, just as these men did in Daniel. Place a bowl of water in the centre to aid contemplation.

Tent three: decorate this prayer station with bright colours. Challenge the group to think about the impact they are having on society. While they are in here they should consider how they represent the kingdom of God in the UK: in our towns, schools, workplaces, sports facilities and friendship groups. Place a few newspapers or other prayer prompts inside and a large sheet of paper and pens in case they want to write something or doodle pictures and prayers. The focus should be on praying for our society, our friends, our government and so on.

Give the young people as much time as they need to move between the tents and pray.

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SESSION 3 of 4

The writing on the wall

MEETING AIM

To reflect on pride and humility, and to set our minds and hearts on being who we feel God wants us to be.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 5

BACKGROUND

Nebuchadnezzar was not the biological father of Belshazzar, but it was common to refer to one king as the son of the previous one. Belshazzar's real father, Nabonidus, had become king but had withdrawn to Arabia and left the rule of Babylon to his eldest son. The Medo-Persian army surrounding Babylon was looking for a way into the strongly defended city. Belshazzar's exuberant party was an arrogant display of contempt for the army that besieged him, based on the fact that Babylon had huge, impenetrable walls.

5 GATHERING TIME

As the young people arrive, share out your refreshments and chat about the past week. Make sure everyone has a drink and then read out some "I have never..." statements. If they have never done that thing they should take a swig, but if they have they should. Try statements such as, "I have never...winked at someone"; "...tripped over running up stairs"; "...put a disgusting ingredient in someone's drink or food (either accidentally or on purpose)"; "...stayed silent and let a friend take the blame"; or "...stayed silent and taken someone else's glory".

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

Depending on your numbers, divide the group into two teams. Ask each team to nominate a 'spotter' for every round, who will need to stand somewhere higher (eg on a stage, balcony or chair) to look down and guess what the rest of the group are trying to spell out or depict with their bodies.

Give each team a list of five words or phrases (different ones so they don't cheat by looking at the other team) and have a simple race between the teams, with the first to guess them all winning. The list could include a bicycle, a star, the word 'race', a tree, a boat, the crucifixion scene, the Deathly Hallows symbol, 999 or a house.

15 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: printouts of Daniel 5; felt-tip pens; paper

Give out copies of the Bible passage and felt-tip pens. Read Daniel 5 together and chat about the events of the story. What happened? How would they have felt if they were Belshazzar or one of his guests?

Split the group into two and read the Bible passage again. The first team should look out for pride in the story and the second team should look out for humility. After chatting together in their teams they should report back the role these attitudes play in Belshazzar and Daniel's actions, and the results of these. It will be chaotic and far from academic, but that's fine.

Draw the shape of a person on two sheets of paper. On one write PRIDE and on the other write HUMILITY. Have the group discuss and write on the relevant shape the qualities of people who have these traits. What do people with these traits do in different situations? Does it work out better or worse for them? Compare and contrast each way of life and discuss how it worked out for Belshazzar and Daniel. What can we learn from them and what does God hope will be the outcome of the way we choose to live?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to continue your discussion of the Bible passage, making sure everyone gets the chance to contribute:

- Have you ever acted like Belshazzar? What did you do?
- Have you ever acted like Daniel? What happened?
- Who else in the Bible was proud or humble?
- Why do proud people sometimes succeed while humble people get left behind? Is that true for ever?
- How can being humble be a positive thing in our lives?
- Is God calling you to set aside your pride in a certain situation? How might you need to change your behaviour?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: paper; felt-tip pens

Put the young people into pairs and challenge them to come up with words that form an appropriate acronym for PRIDE and HUMILITY. For example, for PRIDE they might write: "People Whose Insecurity Depends on Ego". Who can come up with the best one? Once everyone has finished, ask for some volunteers to read theirs out. Discuss what everyone thinks of these ideas.

Encourage the young people to come up with an acronym that could act as personal mission statement for their whole life or just for the coming week. Allow them to decorate and colour them if they want to as a way of being mindful or meditating on the challenge they are setting themselves.

5 PRAYER

You will need: paper; pens

Ask everyone to close their eyes and encourage them to think of times when they have been arrogant and proud. Tell them to think of people they have hurt or annoyed, or ways they have not reflected the kingdom of God or been a good representative. Allow them to bring these things before God and ask his forgiveness.

Encourage the young people to choose one act of humility and service to do this week without any expectation of recognition or reward. It should just be one thing they don't tell anyone about, and are prepared to do without any fuss, ambition or hidden motive. It should be a small, easy act that blesses someone or improves our world. They should write it down somewhere to remember it, pray for the people who will be blessed by it, and pray for humility and generosity of spirit to become more like Jesus every day.

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SESSION 4 of 4

The lions' den

MEETING AIM

To explore our commitment to integrity: running from what is evil and chasing what is right, no matter the cost.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Daniel 6

BACKGROUND

By the time of the lions' den episode, Daniel is probably between 80 and 90 years old. Presumably he sinned as much as any human, but he is one of the few characters in the Bible who comes through completely untarnished, with no reports of failure or scandal. In fact, he manages to break the law...without sinning. He is convicted of a crime that is not a sin, and he only committed it in order to avoid sinning!

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the group and share out any drinks and snacks you have. Chat about the week the young people have had. Ask the group if they have any role models. These could be people they know or celebrities.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: Post-it notes, pictures of celebrities; pens

Stick some pictures of celebrities up around the room. Ask the young people to write on a Post-it something they admire about that person and something they feel lets them down about their behaviour or attitudes. Stick these next to the pictures. Once everyone has finished, go around and chat about what people have written.

Politicians' and celebrities' lives are often held under a microscope today, and all too often scandal, hypocrisy and lies are discovered. Imagine investigating a politician to be our next prime minister and finding no wrongdoing. How would that feel? What effects would it have on our nation?

Ask them what kind of politician would impress them in terms of their private life, the way they speak, their passion and

charisma, how they deal with people, and their attitudes towards women, the disabled, LGBTQ people, those of other races and religions, and young people. What would a truly 'Christian' MP look like? Is it possible? Do they know any MPs who are Christians?

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles; paper; pens

Divide the group into two (if you have small group, stay as one). Without looking at the Bible, each team must act out the story of Daniel and the lions' den in as much detail as they can remember. However, each person must play their part with a strong accent (eg Yorkshire, Cockney, Australian or Irish) or in the style of a popular character (eg Yoda, Batman or Hermione Granger).

First, the group should jot down as much as they can remember from the story before choosing characters and setting up some simple scenes. Make sure you mix people with more experience of the Bible with those who might be new to church. Don't make it about how much they know, but about inclusion and fun.

Read out the story from Daniel 6 and, once you have finished, chat about the differences and similarities between your dramas and the actual story. Ask the group to write down all their questions and the things that confuse them on slips of paper and throw these into a bowl in the middle of the group for the next activity.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

One at a time, allow them to take a question from the bowl and try to answer it before discussing it as a group. You might want to add a few questions yourself to help bring out some of the subtler issues.

After you have been through the questions, try to come up with a top-ten list of lessons learned from Daniel that might be principles for us to live by. For example:

- Others perhaps considered it risky for Daniel to pray, as was his custom. Daniel knew that the safest but most radical thing he could do was obey God.
- It isn't hard to see why people are people-pleasers; it can make our lives a lot more comfortable. Like Daniel, we should choose to speak the truth even if our voices tremble.
- Like Daniel, we should pray regularly so that praying is not a new idea when hard times come along and it seems more urgent.

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: the top ten from 'Chatting together'; phones or paper; felt-tip pens

Using your top ten from the previous activity, tell the young people to come up with a nice pithy quote of their own about an element of the discussion that has grabbed them the most. They should then artistically turn this into an inspirational wallpaper graphic (or for those without phones a poster or postcard design): probably some kind of picture or colours with the quote written over the top. There are plenty of apps designed to make really effective graphics like this very easily. Try *Typorama* or *Phonto*.

5 PRAYER

You will need: small mirrors; Post-it notes; pens;

Give each young person a mirror (or make sure everyone can see a mirror) and some Post-it notes. Encourage them to look in the mirror and write one or two things they admire about the person they see, and one or two things they feel let down by about their behaviour or attitude. As they do so they should pray and ask God to speak to them about any changes he would make to their lives and character, and what he is proud of about them.

Prompt them to add a score out of ten for how committed they are to change the things they are less proud of. Remind them how committed God is to loving them into the best version of themselves (10/10) and ask them to write that on the Post-it. Now tell them to grab a friend (or two) and briefly pray for each other: for peace, knowledge of his love and closeness, and to strengthen their character and speak to them about how to have more integrity and boldness in their faith and daily lives.

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