



MCG
Study Guide
Daniel
January 10- 16

Wednesday January 10th - Dreams

Reading

Read Daniel 2:1 – 3.

“I had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means”

One of the great realities about God is that He is a God that communicates. His communication is experienced in many ways: through the wise counsel of others, through intuitive impressions given by His Spirit, through our conscience, and ultimately through His Word.

God can utilize any number of instruments to express Himself to others. Many have been influenced through nature, others through works of art and God can also utilize dreams.

In a recent issue of *Christianity Today* (January 2013), a Muslim man describes his commitment to follow Isa al Masih, Jesus the Messiah. Surprisingly, a rather "ordinary" miracle caused this man to open his heart to Jesus. Here's how he described the miracle:

One night the only food my wife and I had was a small portion of macaroni. My wife prepared it very nicely. Then one of her friends knocked on the door. I told myself, *The macaroni is not sufficient for even the two of us, so how will it be enough for three of us?* But because we have no other custom, we opened the door, and she came in to eat with us.

While we were eating, the macaroni started to multiply; it became full in the bowl. I suspected that something was wrong with my eyes, so I started rubbing them. I thought maybe my wife hid some macaroni under the small table, so I checked, but there was nothing. My wife and I looked at each other, but because the guest was there we said nothing.

Afterward I lay down on the bed, and as I slept, Isa came to me and asked me, "Do you know who multiplied the macaroni?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I am Isa al Masih [Jesus, the Messiah]. If you follow me, not only the macaroni but your life will be multiplied."

We live in a culture which doubts the supernatural and as a result, have become dull to God who is at work. God knows how to get our attention, but as with any person, He longs for us to be attentive to His communication with us.

One of the ways that we can grow attentive to God is by doing exactly what you are now doing. Spending time thinking about His word, being consciously present to Him, talking with Him and being attentive to how He might be speaking to you.

Our God is a God who speaks. Discipleship begins with taking time to listen, hear and consider all the ways He might be trying to get your attention.

Mediation/Application

Take 5 minutes to be silent and invite God to direct your thoughts. Be conscious of where your mind begins to drift. Are they thoughts about things that God wants you to commit to Him? Are they ideas that might be inspired by God's Spirit? Are they painful? – offer them to God. Joyful? – praise him. Regrets? Affirm your acceptance of God's forgiveness.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- Prayer for the launch of the new Tansley MCG and Pier and Janette Yapur who are facilitating.
- Remember those, who you know, who have lost loved ones over the past year.

Thursday January 11th - Revelation

Reading Daniel 2:4 – 11

No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.

The advisors to the king were stumped, they were trained to interpret dreams but they were not able to reveal them. Interpretation and revelation are two different sciences.

Essentially the king's dream was a showdown between the gods of Babylon and the God of Daniel. The gods of the Babylonian wise men offered interpretation but only the God of Daniel – and our God – could offer revelation; revealing not only the dream but the interpretation.

We see similar 'contests' happening in our day between the interpretative powers of the 'gods of science' and the revelatory perspective of Scripture.

In his book *God's Undertaker*, science writer John C. Lennox tells following story:

Let us imagine that Aunt Matilda has made a beautiful cake, and we take it along to be analyzed by a group of the world's top scientists The nutrition scientists will tell us about the number of calories in the cake and its nutritional effect; the biochemists will inform us about the structure of proteins, fats, etc. in the cake ... the physicists will be able to analyze the cake in terms of fundamental particles; and the mathematicians will no doubt offer us a set of elegant equations to describe the behavior of those particles.

We have certainly been given a description of *how* the cake was made and *how* its various [ingredients] relate to each other, but suppose I now ask the assembled group of experts a final question: *Why* was the cake made? The grin on Aunt Matilda's face shows she knows the answer, for she made it for a purpose. But all the [scientists] in the world will not be able to answer the question—

and it is no insult to their disciplines to state their incapacity to answer it. Their disciplines ... cannot answer the "why" questions connected with the purpose for which the cake was made. In fact, the only way we shall ever get an answer is if Aunt Matilda reveals it to us. But if she does not disclose the answer to us, the plain fact is that no amount of scientific analysis will enlighten us.¹

One of our MCG covenants is to daily engage with Scripture – just as you have today. The more we learn to hear God in his Word, the more familiar we will be in hearing God by his Spirit. God is still in the revelation business. He wants to reveal more of Himself to you – personally. Unlike the gods of the Babylonians He is the kind of God who lives among humans.

Mediation/Application

Consider a verse or passage about God's word that you might commit to memory. Some suggestion you may want to consider are: Psalm 1, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, or Hebrews 4:12.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- Pray for Shari and the Kids Club helpers that re-starts one week from tonight.
- Pray for your neighbours (by name if you know them), that God might reveal himself to them.

¹ John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker* (Lion, 2009), p. 41

Friday January 12th – Tact

Reading 2:12-16

Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.

Daniel and his friends are on the verge of a major crisis, their lives are at risk. It would be easy in this kind of situation to react emotionally. But Daniel keeps his head and responds with great tact as he bides for some time to discern the dream of the king.

A lot hinged on the way that Daniel spoke. He needed great wisdom to bring peace into a very tumultuous time. This same kind of tact is needed for Christians today. We want to speak the truth but we need to speak with tact, love and grace. This is not always easy to do.

Matteo Ricci was an Italian missionary to China in the 16th century who also showed great tact and wisdom in a culture that was not open to the Christian message. Ricci managed to win the respect of those he served so that even today, if you ask a Chinese person to name a famous European from the past, they will as likely as not name Ricci.

He arrived in Macao, a Portuguese possession on the border of China. The mission there was run by another Jesuit, Ricci's former teacher Alessandro Valignano, who believed that Christian mission shouldn't be about striding up to the "natives," telling them their religion was wrong, and instructing them in a new one. Ricci believed that missionaries should be sensitive to local culture and treat the local people with respect, on the basis that they, too, had valuable things to say.

So, when Ricci finally gained permission to enter China in 1583 (the Chinese authorities generally didn't allow Europeans to enter at this time), he went dressed as a Buddhist monk, speaking Chinese and presenting himself as a humble seeker after wisdom. He wasn't very successful at first (the people of the area he arrived in, near Canton, didn't speak the Chinese dialect he had learned in Macao, and they didn't much like Buddhist monks, either), but he persevered and won the trust of the people.

In particular, Ricci made many contacts at the imperial court, where people were greatly impressed by his humble approach and his interest in Chinese learning. The emperor himself liked the gifts that Ricci brought him (especially a clock and a harpsichord), and Ricci sought to find new ways to express the Christian faith that made sense to the Chinese. He not only translated various Christian texts into Chinese, but in 1603 also wrote a famous book (in Chinese) called *The True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*, which presented Christianity in the form of a philosophical discussion in the Neo-Confucian tradition. The book was very well received.

Ricci was the first great Jesuit missionary to China. Many more followed him and became closely involved in all kinds of scientific and cultural pursuits.²

As neighbourhood missionaries, we too need tact when sharing our beliefs and perspectives with others. While we may want to tell people all about the Gospel in a way that we feel comfortable, wisdom would suggest that we learn to share it with tact in ways that those we are talking with can hear and receive.

Mediation/Application

Think about how spirituality is portrayed in popular culture (tv. shows, movies, music). How might these portrayals provide an opportunity to share a Biblical perspective on spirituality? Ask God to help you see and take opportunities to tactfully share the Christian perspective in your relationships.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- Ask God for an opportunity to show someone His love in a practical way this week.
- Remember our Bright Corner Ministry which meets tomorrow.

² Jonathan Hill, "Christianity's Cultural Contributions," Christianitytoday.com (5-03-2006)

Saturday January 13th –Prayer

Reading Daniel 2:17 – 23

Daniel... explained the matter to his friends... he urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven..."

Praying for others is a cornerstone of what MCG's do. We pray for those in our group, for those in our neighbourhoods and the larger NBBC family. I find that some requests are very slow to be answered and sometimes, hard to tell if they are being answered. Perhaps this is because our prayers are too tame and not very bold.

Perhaps we do this because we don't want to be let down in our prayers by asking God for something we think is too... big... hard... impossible? Or perhaps we don't feel our faith can support the type of request that would appear miraculous.

Travel back 200 years in Christian history to John Newton, the slave-trader-turned-pastor and hymn writer. He would receive almost unbelievable answers to his prayers because he believed in what he called "large asking." When explaining what he meant, Newton would often cite a legendary story of a man who asked Alexander the Great to give him a huge sum of money in exchange for his daughter's hand in marriage. Alexander agreed, and told the man to request of Alexander's treasurer whatever he wanted. So, the father of the bride went and asked for an enormous amount. The treasurer was startled and said he could not give out that kind of money without a direct order. Going to Alexander, the treasurer argued that even a small fraction of the money requested would more than serve the purpose.

"No," replied Alexander, "let him have it all. I like that fellow. He does me honor. He treats me like a king and proves by what he asks that he believes me to be both rich and generous."

Newton concluded: "In the same way, we should go to the throne of God's grace and present petitions that express honorable views of the love, riches, and bounty of our King."

What if we began to ask God for bigger things, not for ourselves but for His glory? What if we grew our faith by seeing God answering our prayers that we never thought He would answer but dared to ask anyways?

The power of prayer cannot be diminished by distance; it is not limited by age, infirmity, political change or restrictions. The power of prayer in the life of an obedient Christian can only be undermined by neglect.

David Bentley-Taylor

Daniel and his friends asked God for a huge request, but their lives were literally on the line. If God didn't answer they were dead. Imagine how deeply and desperately they must have prayed. Imagine how relentless they must have been in coming before God.

What if our prayers demonstrated that kind of intensity and passion? How might we be changed? How might our church and neighbourhood be changed? I'm sure if we were in the same situation as Daniel's friends we would pray with much more energy than we currently do. Wouldn't it be good if we would pray in that way without having to be in such dire straights?

Mediation/Application

As you pray through the prayer points today, first ask God to move you to pray more boldly. Our ability to pray and intercede is not solely an act of our will, it too is a gift of God's grace. Ask God for the grace to pray "large asking" prayers.

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- Pray for the gathering tomorrow, that God would make His presence known among us.
- Take time to confess you faults and sins in preparation for tomorrow's corporate worship time.

Sunday January 14th – The Rock that Crushes Kingdoms

Reading

Read Daniel 2

Sermon Notes:

The dreams symbolism:

- The head of gold was _____
- The chest of silver was _____
- The waist and thighs of bronze was _____
- The legs of iron were _____
- The feet of iron and clay might be _____

A comparison of Kingdoms:

1. A _____ king vs. an _____ God.
2. A king who is _____ vs. a God who is _____
3. A _____ kingdom vs. an _____ kingdom.
4. A proud king is _____ vs. a _____ king is exalted.

Mediation/Application

As you think about today's sermon what is one action point that you are taking away?

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- Pray for those who visited our gathering, that God might call them to join us on mission.
- Take time to worship your king.

Monday January 15th – Bold Faith

Reading Daniel 2:24 – 28

No wise man... can explain to the king the mystery... but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.

I don't know about you but every time I read this encounter of Daniel with the king, I can't help but stand in awe of Daniel's boldness! I imagine the scene in this way.

The king has already been put out because Daniel has asked for a stay in executions so he could discern the dream. The king had shown his displeasure with the other wise men when they tried to bide their time, hoping the king would relent, a scheme the king easily sees through (see vs. 8).

Now the king has been anxiously waiting, I suspect that waiting is not something he is used to doing. Daniel is brought before the king. Tension is mounting and the king's patience has worn very thin. The king asks Daniel if he can tell him is dream or not.

If it were me, I'd have said something to the effect of "sure can". Just to ease the king's anxiety. But Daniel doesn't do this he says, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about..." At this point I'm sure the king's blood was beginning to boil. Isn't this almost the exact same answer that caused the king to become so angry that he ordered the execution of the wise men in the first place (see vs. 10 – 11)?

I can almost here Daniel taking a pause to let his words sink in before he boasts about the God he serves who is able to reveal dreams, "...but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries."

Imagine the courageous faith it would have taken for Daniel to boast in God even *before* he reveals the dream's content and interpretation to the king.

I am reminded of the German missionary to England, George Mueller, who was scheduled to preach in America but the ship he was on was delayed by fog and was told that it would be impossible to reach his destination in time.

Undeterred, Mueller asked the captain to pray with him in the chart room. The Captain wondered which lunatic asylum Mueller had come from.

"Mr. Mueller," he said, "do you know how dense this fog is?"

"No, my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life."

Mueller then knelt down and prayed simply. When he had finished the captain was about to pray, but Mueller put his hand on his shoulder, and told him not to.

"First, you do not believe He will' and second, I believe He has, and there is no need whatever for you to pray about it."

"Captain," he continued, I have known my Lord for 52 years, and there has never been a single day that I have failed to get an audience with the King. Get up, captain, and open the door, and you will find the fog is gone."

The captain walked across to the door and opened it. The fog had lifted.³

They say that faith is like a muscle that grows more with exercise. How have you been exercising your faith lately?

Mediation/Application

Take time to confess your doubts to God and share with Him where your faith is weak and your trust is waning. Ask Him, like the man whose boy Jesus was to heal, "Help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

Prayer Points:

As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- Make a special point of praying for those in your MCG today.
- Remember NBBC's afterschool program that resumes today.

³ <https://www.keepandshare.com/doc4/1488/one-of-the-most-moving-stories-of-faith-i-have-ever-read?p=y>

Tuesday January 16th – God's Kingdom

Reading Daniel 2:29 – 49

The rock that struck the stature became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

In this story, the Kingdom of God is compared to a growing mountain. But for many of us it is still a difficult concept to grasp. Philosopher/theologian, Dallas Willard, tells the following story to help us understand the Kingdom and how we can participate in it and avail ourselves to the power of God in this life.

Dallas Willard writes:

As a child I lived in an area of southern Missouri where electricity was available only in the form of lightning. We had more of that than we could use. But in my senior year of high school the REA (Rural Electrification Administration) extended its lines into the area where we lived, and electrical power became available to households and farms.

When those lines came by our farm, a very different way of living presented itself. Our relationships to fundamental aspects of life—daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it—could then be vastly changed for the better. But we still had to believe in the electricity and its arrangements, understand them, and take the practical steps involved in relying on it.

You may think the comparison rather crude, and in some respects it is. But it will help us to understand Jesus' basic message about the kingdom of heaven if we pause to reflect on those farmers who, in effect, heard the message: "Repent, for electricity is at hand." Repent, or turn from their kerosene lamps and lanterns, their iceboxes and cellars, their scrub-boards and rug beaters, their woman-powered sewing machines and their radio with dry-cell batteries.

The power that could make their lives far better was right there near them where, by making relatively simple arrangements, they could utilize it. Strangely, a few did not accept it. They did not enter the kingdom of electricity. Some just didn't want to change. Others could not afford it, or so they thought.

To be sure, that kingdom [God's] has been here as long as we humans have been

*here, and longer. But it has been available to us through simple confidence in Jesus, the Anointed, only from the time he became a public figure.*⁴

We get to participate in this Kingdom and help to make it known to others, not just by telling about it but by living our life from within the Kingdom.

There might be times when we wonder if our small and seemingly feeble attempts to live out the Kingdom life really make that big a difference. But Jesus reminds us what the Kingdom of heaven is like, “It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”⁵

Just like yeast, our small efforts are bringing incremental change to our neighbourhoods, our world our neighbours and our own life. Continue to keep yourself plugged in to the power of the Kingdom you never know when your light will be used to shine in the darkness.

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for you MCG be prepared to share:

- What from chapter 2 of Daniel made an impression on you or what confused you.
- How you have been at engaging the Missional practices this week.

As a group watch The Bible Project’s overview of the book of Daniel and discuss what you learned: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/daniel/>

Prayer Request:

Record the prayer request that are shared at your MCG to inform your prayers this coming week.

- Pray for the church leadership as they continue to encourage the growth of MCGs.
- Think of one person you haven’t seen at the gathering for a while, take time to pray for them.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), pp. 30-31

⁵ Luke 13:20

Missional Community Group (MCG) Covenant

We desire to grow as followers of Jesus who represent Him and His Kingdom well in all of our life. We recognize that God's plan is for us to grow in and through relationships with other like-minded disciples. As those who identify as neighbourhood missionaries we enter into this covenant so that we might be transformed by God's grace and that together we might be transforming agents in our neighbourhood.

To this end, this year, we therefore covenant to:

- Meet regularly for weekly encouragement, accountability, and fellowship in our Missional Community Group and corporately with all of NBBC.
- Seek to grow in likeness to Jesus by engaging in NBBC MCG's shared practices.
- Nurture loving relationships within our Missional Community, accepting others as Christ has accepted us.
- Faithfully steward the resources that God has given us: time, abilities, resources and energy.
- Together discern where God is at work and join Him in His mission to bring the Kingdom of God to our neighbourhood.

In all that we covenant we recognize that we are dependant upon the grace of God to enable us and so we joyfully enter this covenant in hope of what He might do in and through us.

Missional Community Group Shared Practices

1. Daily engage in reading Scripture and pray for God to bless NBBC in it's missional calling.
2. Weekly purposely and intentionally bless another person.
3. Monthly practise table fellowship with someone in your Missional Community.
4. Respond to the Spirit's prompting as you sense Him leading and directing.
5. Share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life as opportunities arise.