



MCG
Study Guide
Daniel
January 24 – 30

Wednesday January 24th – The Power of Story

Reading Read Daniel 4:1 - 8.

*It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs
and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.*

It is only natural to tell good news stories to people – the birth of a child, a promotion at work, a high score in bowling – whatever the news, we delight to share it with those we love. Such was the case with the King of Babylon. He says it was his “pleasure” to tell what God had done for him.

Stories are what entertain us: Movies, T.V. books, gossip – all of these are examples of how our culture tells stories. A Native American proverb says, “Tell me the facts and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in heart forever.”

Storytelling is become much more popular in the business world and marketers are chomping at the bit to tell the stories that shape the way we think and make decisions. Think about the commercials that grab your attention the most, odds are they are telling a story rather than listing the benefits of their product.

Telling the stories of God at work in our lives has a great deal of power. It encourages other believers who may be struggling to see or trust God at work. And it invites those who are far from God to consider Him and think about that it might mean for them to have a relationship with God.

In the book of Revelation we read this concerning Satan:

*For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.
They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony.¹*

¹ Revelation 12:10b-11a

Our stories have power to overcome Satan!

Stories are also fundamental to building relationships. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article by Allison Gopnik entitled "Want a Mind Meld? Tell a Compelling Story," described a variety of brain scan studies that show that stories not only shape one's thoughts, but also foster a connection between a storyteller and listener. The closer the connection, the greater the understanding of the story. Gopnik concluded that "results suggest that we lowly humans are actually as good at mind-melding as [Star Trek's] Vulcans or the Borg. We just do it with stories."²

If you want to build relationships with people in your neighbourhood or in your MCG start telling stories. One of our shared practices is "Share with others the stories of what God is doing in your life as opportunities arise." As with any discipline we will become better with practise.

Mediation/Application

Think of how God has been present to you lately. It may be an answered prayer, or an insight from the Bible, through an act of kindness from another or even a twinge of conviction over sin. Consider how you might tell this event as a story to your MCG when we gather on Tuesday.

Prayer Points:

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

- **Kids Club resumes tonight. Pray for the community that gathers here at the church building in Tansley**
- **Pray what part of your story you could share with someone new. Who will it be? _____**

² Allison Gopnik, "Want A Mind Meld? Tell A Compelling Story," The Wall Street Journal (4-5-16)

Thursday January 25th – Sovereignty.

Reading Daniel 4:9 – 18

...so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth.

Sovereignty is a rich theological term that acknowledges that God is always in control even when it may seem as if He is not. God is never coerced or manipulated He is always in control. This can be hard to accept when we are stuck in a difficult circumstance, and yet even then God uses hardship to shape us more into the person He longs for us to be.

Imagine you're handed a script of your newborn child's entire life. Better yet, you're given an eraser and five minutes to edit out whatever you want. You read that she will have a learning disability in grade school. Reading, which comes easily for some kids, will be laborious for her. In high school, she will make a great circle of friends, then one of them will die of cancer. After high school, she will get into her preferred college, but while there, she will lose a leg in a car accident. Following that, she will go through a difficult depression. A few years later she'll get a great job, then lose that job in an economic downturn. She'll get married, but then go through the grief of separation.

With this script of your child's life and five minutes to edit it, what would you erase? Psychologist Jonathon Haidt poses this question in this hypothetical exercise: Wouldn't you want to take out all the stuff that would cause them pain?

If you could erase every failure, disappointment, and period of suffering, would that be a good idea? Would that cause them to grow into the best version of themselves? Is it possible that we actually need adversity and setbacks—maybe even crises and trauma—to reach the fullest potential of development and growth?

God doesn't always erase all our stress and pain before it starts. Instead, God can use the failures, disappointments, and periods of suffering to

help us grow. God isn't at work producing the circumstances I want. God is at work in bad circumstances to produce the me he wants.³

Ultimately, this means that the hardship, pain and trials that you undergo are not a waste – they are being used by God for your benefit. God's sovereignty guarantees that God is still in control and can be trusted. This does not make hardships easier, but it does make them more meaningful.

This is why we are told "...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."⁴ Note that it does not say, "*for* everything give thanks" but "*in* everything..." We may not be thankful *for* that hardship, trial or suffering we are in, but we can be thankful *in* the midst of it because our hardship will not be wasted because God is at work.

Mediation/Application

Take time to think back to a trial, hardship or difficulty you found yourself in. Consider what good may have come out of it and thank God for those good outcomes.

Prayer Points:

Tonight is NBBC's monthly virtual prayer meeting. As you pray for your church family, community, MCG and yourself, please remember these prayer request:

- From 8-9pm you can join and listen/pray for our ministries and Missional Community Groups. Call 1-800-930-0058 and access code 8051842. OR on your computer/mobile device go to: hello.freeconference.com/conf/call/8051842
- Pray that many will find being together in prayer a meaningful way to discern God and gain His heart for this world.

³ John Ortberg, "Don't Waste a Crisis," Leadership Journal (Winter, 2011)

⁴ 1 Thess. 5:18

Friday January 26th – Truth Telling

Reading 4:19 – 27

Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right.

Can you imagine the courage it must have taken for Daniel to tell the King to renounce his sin and do what was right? Telling the truth to others can be very intimidating, especially when you know the truth will not be easy to receive. Often, because we think people won't receive the truth we reason that we are let off the hook from having to tell the truth. Yet, all people need good friends who will risk speaking the truth to them in love.

Christian businessman and author John D. Beckett shares the following personal story about the redemptive power of speaking the truth in love:

I was in a dental chair being prepped for the replacement of a filling. Just as my mouth was filled with dental hardware so I could only mumble, the dental technician said, out of the blue, "You're Mr. Beckett, aren't you?" I grunted assent.

"Well, I want to thank you for firing my husband."

I was stuck. I couldn't move. I couldn't speak. I could only listen to the ensuing monologue.

"It happened ten years ago," she said. "A few days after your company hired my husband, he was notified he had failed a drug test. You may not recall," she continued, "but you called him into your office before he left. You said, 'I realize I don't have any choice but to terminate you, but I want to tell you something. You're at a crossroads. You can keep going the way you are, and the results are very predictable. Or you can take this as a wake-up call. You can decide you're going to turn your life around.'"

I'm sure the technician couldn't see the beads of perspiration on my forehead under all the paraphernalia as she continued: "I want you to know, my husband took your advice. Today, he's a good father, a good husband, and he has a fine job. Thank you for firing my husband!"

I wish I could say that all our terminations have turned out this way. ... Regardless of the outcome, however, we must be prepared to take action when a situation can't be brought around. In a strange way, it's an aspect of our care for people.⁵

Courage and wisdom are needed to speak the truth in a manner that the other can hear and receive. Such truth-telling is a mark of true Christian community. Learning to love others enough, so that we overcome our fears and speak the truth is part of the maturing process for followers of Jesus.

Mediation/Application

Can you recall a time when someone spoke a hard truth to you? Take time to thank God for that person and their courage to speak into your life. Ask God if there is anyone He would like you to speak to and pray for the wisdom and courage to be obedient.

Prayer Points:

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

- Truth certainly sets us free. However, living truth requires intentionality and courage. Take the time to do the meditation/application above
 - If you heard a nudge, consider the process to speak truth to someone today & record here how it went.
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5 John D. Beckett, *Mastering Monday* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), pp. 157-158

Saturday January 27th – Pride

Reading Daniel 4:28 – 33

Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?

Two ducks and a rather egotistical frog developed a friendship. When their pond dried up, the ducks knew they could easily fly to another location, but what of their friend the frog? Finally, they decided to fly with a stick between their two bills, and with the frog hanging onto the stick by his mouth. All went well until a man looked up and saw them in the sky. “What a clever idea,” said the man. “I wonder who thought of that?”

“I did,” said the frog.

Pride is the source of many people’s downfalls. Part of its danger is that it is so easily hidden from others and even from ourselves. How do we know if we are proudful? Oswald Sanders said that “Pride is a sin of whose presence its victim is least conscious.” He offered three tests by means of which it can soon be discovered:

The test of precedence. How do we react when another is selected for the assignment we expected, or for the office we coveted? When another is promoted and we are overlooked? When another outshines us in gifts and accomplishments.

The test of sincerity. In our moments of honest self-criticism, we will say many things about ourselves, and really mean them. But how do we feel when others, especially our rivals, say exactly the same thing about us?

The test of criticism. Does criticism arouse hostility and resentment in our hearts, and cause us to fly into immediate self-justification?⁶

⁶ Sanders, J. Oswald, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 143.

Perhaps it is timely that the day after we learned about telling the truth we find ourselves considering how to hear the truth. Healthy churches and healthy MCGs learn to speak the truth to one another in love. It is among the hardest lessons of being a disciple of Jesus.

In Obadiah 1:3 it says, “The pride of your heart has deceived you...” Self-deception grows out of a proud heart. The continual call to humility and humbling ourselves before God is because it keeps us from the poison of self-deception. The next time someone says something that hurts your pride try thanking them for speaking to you and then bring it to God in prayer. If they are mistaken you’re no worse off, and if they are right they have done you a great service.

Mediation/Application

Take a few minutes to prayerfully consider the three tests of pride that Sanders suggest. Humble yourself before God where needed.

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for tomorrow mornings gathering. Be mindful of how God has worked in your life or someone else’s and consider sharing that with those who gather.
- Pray for the upcoming youth retreat as our young people experience relationship with one another and with God.

Sunday January 28th – The King Bows Down

Reading Read Daniel 4

Sermon Notes:

Two symptoms of pride:

1. Pride blinds us from seeing _____.
2. Pride blinds us from seeing _____.

The cure for pride is:

1. To _____ to _____.
2. To _____ God's _____.

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:

- All kingdoms eventually fail and fall when God's Kingdom comes into it. What aspect of your kingdom need to be softened or need to fall in order for His Kingdom to reign more in your life? Meditate and reflect in silence.
- Pray for those who return to work Monday and live Jesus in their routines at work and homes.

Monday January 29th – God of Sanity and the insanity of Evil

Reading Daniel 4:34 – 35

I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.

I have had the opportunity to be with many people in times of crisis. When they are the victims of evil. Often through the tears of sadness or rage, the question “why” is uttered. It is a cry for rationality when their situation is irrational. This is perhaps the most insidious aspects of evil – the insanity of it all. We want our tragedies to make sense, but evil is senseless, it is insane!

"I think the Joker killed Heath Ledger." So writes attorney Jay Gaskill in his review of *The Dark Knight*, a film about the superhero Batman. On January 22, 2008, six months before the movie's opening, Heath Ledger, who played the villainous Joker, was found unconscious in his Manhattan apartment. The medical examiner reported that the 28-year-old had died from an accidental overdose of a lethal brew of prescription drugs.

Reviewers lauded Ledger for his "electrifying" performance. Ledger's character is more than a sociopathic master criminal. Reviewers use the language of the supernatural, calling him "demonic" and "diabolical"— "a hound fresh out of hell," "a vivid, compelling picture of ... evil," and "like Satan." Michael Caine, who plays Batman's butler Alfred, said that he found Ledger's performance so terrifying and disturbing that he sometimes forgot his lines.

Reportedly, the Joker role had taken a decided toll on the actor's health. For weeks, he was unable to sleep, averaging only two hours a night. He told a *New York Times* reporter in November 2007 that even after taking two sleeping pills, "I couldn't stop thinking. My body was exhausted, and my mind was still going." He also told a reporter that "the only way that I can act" is to climb inside the skin of the person he was playing. For *The Dark Knight*, he spent a month alone in a hotel room to work on his character and voice, perfecting an unhinged cackle that sends

shivers up the audience's spine. But by immersing himself in the role of the Joker, Ledger might well have gazed too deeply into the abyss. "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you." This famous but unclear quote by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has at least one interpretation: if a person gazes too long at evil, it will become a part of him. Did Ledger fall prey to this?⁷

We often think that the only reason God doesn't want us to entertain evil is because of His standards, when actually He is trying to protect us. Humanity was created for righteousness and holiness. When we follow after the ways of God's spirit we become better humans.

When we meander down pathways of sin we diminish as people. We may not have become as distorted as King Nebuchadnezzar but sin always takes a toll.

Mediation/Application

Sometimes we simply need to confess our sins to God and be honest with those areas where we are struggling and honest with how our sin has distorted us. Spend some time confessing to a God who longs to set you free from the insanity of sin and evil.

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for your pastors and leaders. Today is the Pastors sabbath. Pray that they would be diligent to raise their eyes to heaven today.
- Tomorrow our MCG's have regular meetings and both have Potlucks planned in the near future. Pray for wisdom as they live together and learn together.

⁷ Adapted from Maria Hsia Chang, "Evil to Him Who Thinks Evil," New Oxford Review (October 2008).

Tuesday January 30th – Restoration

Reading Daniel 4:36 – 37

I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.

According to the online etymology dictionary, the word “restore” means to “to build up again, repair.”⁸ God is in the restoration business! When people, who have been turning from God and towards sin, repent and turn towards God He “repairs” and builds them up.

Yesterday we looked at the importance of confession. Sometimes it can be easy to get mired in the things over which we have regret, guilt or shame. It is as if we feel that we need to “punish” ourselves by feeling bad as a sort of penance for the wrong we have done. But this is not God’s will. The beauty and wonder of God’s grace is that *as soon as* we confess and acknowledge our sin before God, *as soon as* we determine to turn from that sin God restores us.

You see God wants to set us free from sin and all of the negative emotional attachments that come along with it. It is not a matter of feeling as if we deserve forgiveness because forgiveness is not deserved it is a gift of God’s grace. As we fully embrace that gift as the generous, gracious offer that it is, we will no longer feel we have to, in some way, pay.

But it is not only that God restores us. Nebuchadnezzar “became even greater than before.” God’s restoration makes us better.

There is a Japanese word, kintsukuroi, that means “golden repair.” It is the art of restoring broken pottery with gold so the fractures are literally illuminated—a kind of physical expression of its spirit. As a philosophy, kintsukuroi celebrates imperfection as an integral part of the story, not something to be disguised. The artists believe that when something has suffered damage and has a history, it becomes more beautiful.

⁸ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/restore>

In kintsukuroi, the true life of an object (or a person) begins the moment it breaks and reveals that it is vulnerable. The gap between once pristine appearance and its visible imperfection deepens its appeal.

Part of the miracle of God’s restoration of us from sin and its consequences, is that God uses them to make us “greater” as people. Amy Carmichael (1867–1951) was a missionary to India who suffered enormously in her life. She once wrote these words:

I have noticed that when one who has not suffered draws near to one in pain, there is rarely much power to help. I have wondered if it can be the same in the sphere of prayer. Does pain accepted and endured give some quality that would otherwise be lacking in prayer? What if every stroke of pain, or hour of weariness or loneliness, or any other trial of flesh or spirit, could carry us a pulse beat nearer some other life, some life for which the ministry of prayer is needed. Would it not be worthwhile to suffer? Ten thousand times yes. And surely it must be so, for the further we are drawn into the fellowship of Calvary with our dear Lord, the [more tender] we are toward others. God never wastes His children's pain.⁹

God will not waste our pain, hardships, trials or even our repentance from sin. He restores us, it is what God does.

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for your MCG be prepared to share:

- What from chapter 3 of Daniel made an impression on you or what confused you.
- As you think and plan for your next pot-luck gathering who from the community might you invite? Talk with your group about who each of you might encourage to come.

⁹ Michael Bauman, Lawrence Kimbrough, Martin I. Klauber, and Keith P. Wells, *90 Days with the Christian Classics* (B&H Publishing, 1999)

- As you have been praying about a missional project for the neighbourhood, what ideas have come to mind? Share and discuss these together and take time to pray about them.

Prayer Request:

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

- A
- B
- C
- D

***pray for these requests this week and see how God forms you in the process**

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.