



MCG
Study Guide
Daniel
January 31 – February 6

Wednesday January 31st – Sacrilege

Reading Daniel 5:1 - 4

“...they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and... drank from them.”

Using that which is set apart for holy purposes for common purposes is an act of sacrilege. It is to desecrate what was intended to be sacred. In North America we have all but abandoned this idea; almost nothing is sacred any more. This is what the king was doing when he took the goblets that were from the temple, which were sacred, and used them for a common drunk-fest. It was certainly not out of ignorance that the king did this. This was a deliberate act of arrogance and defiance.

We see the same arrogance and defiance playing out in our culture. Things that were once considered holy are no longer thought of in that way. We read in Scripture that marriage was created by God to be a sacred institution which reflects the person of God - that a male and female bound in covenant love is to be a reflection of God Himself. This sacred understanding of marriage has been set aside by society so that any relationship between two adults who commit to one another form what society has now redefined marriage to be. It is no longer a sacred covenant partnership, it is simply a common contractual relationship.

The idea that human life is sacred because it is made in the image of God has steered ethical reasoning in Canadian society since its founding. But now, the sacredness of life is questioned, ‘How can humans say that their life has more value than other animal life?’ And because there is no longer a common understanding of the innate sacredness of human life, it has caused us to ask if human life has any value when it is unwanted and in the womb, or when it is old and has less quality. And so there has come a subtle shift towards a common utilitarian understanding of human life; human life only has value as it has been deemed to have usefulness to other people.

Do not entertain such sacrilege. You are holy! You have been *made* uniquely in the image of God, *purchased* by the blood of God’s only Son

and *inhabited* as a temple by His Spirit; you are no ordinary human. You are a sacred being, we are ambassadors of God and His Kingdom, we are agents who are part of a divine subversive plan to bring all of creation under the rule of God, sanctifying it for His use and His glory. And when we are baptized and when we celebrate communion we are reminded of this one reality; our lives have been set apart, made holy. For we are sacred! Do not live a common life.

Meditation/Application

Think about what ways we live that suggest we have forgotten that we are sacred beings. What changes do you need to make in how you think or act so that your life reflects the holiness God intended?

Prayer Points:

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

- **January is ending but God's work continues. Reflect on stories that reflect His character in January and thank Him for these.**
- **Each week there are prayer items on the back of our Sunday morning bulletin. Consider praying through these each week. Today pray for Mark Zammit in Beaver Creek Correction facility.**

Thursday February 1st – Uncertainty

Reading Daniel 5:5 – 9

“...they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified...”

There is something within us that makes us curious to understand how things work, why things are the way they are, and how they operate. As humans we love to explore the mysterious and are enthralled by the possibility of those things we have not figured out. For example, consider the fascination we have with life on other planets.

Curiosity in and of itself is not wrong, but more often than not our curiosity is driven by a desire to control. This was part of the temptation that caused Adam and Eve to pick the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.¹ They wanted to know for themselves what was good and what was evil. It was not an attempt to experience good and evil, but to define it. This was God’s prerogative alone but they were reaching for control.

Uncertainty is destabilizing. It makes us dependent and we hate the feeling of not being in control. For many, like King Belshazzar, it can even be a very frightening experience.

There's a trendy little acronym that's making the rounds in managerial circles—VUCA, which stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The U.S. Army War College first introduced the concept to

*Until I learned to trust
I never learned to pray,
And I did not fully learn to trust
Till sorrow came my way.
Until I felt my weakness,
His strength I never knew;
Nor dreamed till I was stricken
That He could see me through.*

¹ Genesis 2:15 – 17, 3:1 – 7

describe the new realities after the Cold War ended. VUCA refers to the perfect storm of circumstances of life that sometimes hit individuals, families, and churches. It's what happens when you face a string of complicated and ever-changing "unknown unknowns." Or, as an article in the Harvard Business Review put it, VUCA is a catch-all phrase for "Hey, it's crazy out there!"²

Uncertainty reminds us of who is ultimately in control. It allows us opportunity to exercise our trust in God. Unlike Belshazzar, uncertainty because things are not in our control is not a reason for fear, but a reason for rejoicing because when it is completely out of our control we know it is completely in God's.

Meditation/Application

Take some time to think about those things that you are worried or anxious over because you have no control. As you think about them offer them to God in thanks that He is in control. Commit each one to your Heavenly Father by praying "Your will be done" regarding each of those concerns.

Prayer Points:

Tonight, is our monthly worship gathering from 8-9pm. Consider joining the worship teams and others as we pray and worship together.

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

- Today is February 1st, National Freedom Day; signifying the signing of the 13th amendment to outlaw slavery. Pray for freedom for those who are oppressed and marginalized.
- Pray for your neighbourhood as it builds community, specifically, for those who deal with mental illness and anxiety.

² Nathan Bennett and G. James Lemoine, "What VUCA Really Means for You," Harvard Business Review (January-February 2014)

Friday February 2nd – Loving God with all Your Mind

Reading Daniel 5:10 - 12

“...he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom...”

There are those who try to mock Christians as being intellectually deficient. The militant atheist scientist, Richard Dawkins, illustrates this point when he says, “I have a (you might say fanatical) desire for people to use their own minds and make their own choices, based upon publicly available evidence. Religious fanatics want people to switch off their own minds, ignore the evidence, and blindly follow a holy book based upon private ‘revelation’.”³

Do Christians have to check their science or their brains at the church door? Michael Egnor, a leading brain surgeon, used to think so. After years of rigorous scientific training, he was sure a scientific worldview was incompatible with any form of religion. Ironically, it was science itself that showed him how mistaken he was.

Egnor was raised as an agnostic who regarded Christianity as an inspiring set of moral tales—lessons that were spiritually uplifting but not true. Why was he so certain? Egnor explained, “As a science major in college, I was steeped in Darwinian evolution, which seemed to demonstrate that life could be explained perfectly well by material mechanisms alone. There was no reason to invoke God.” Egnor's studies also covered Freud, whose theories persuaded him that “religion is wish fulfillment.” He continued, “Every time I even considered Christianity, I was stopped cold by the thought that it would mean abandoning scientific integrity.”

Over the years, Egnor rose to the top of his field. He was appointed professor and vice president of neurosurgery at Stony Brook University and became an award-winning brain surgeon, named one of New York's best doctors by New York Magazine. One of his specialties was the

³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/richard-dawkins-you-ask-the-questions-special-427003.html>

treatment of hydrocephalus ("water on the brain"), and while developing a theory of blood flow to the brain, his research took a surprising turn. He realized the cranial system he was studying was like an ingeniously designed gadget. The filter that protects the delicate capillaries from the pulsating force of the heartbeat is a finely tuned mechanism like the vibration dampers widely used in engineering. "In fact," Engor said, "most of what I needed to know was not in biology textbooks but in engineering textbooks."

Eventually Egnor realized that virtually all biological research operates on the presumption of design. That presumption led him to faith in a Designer and then to faith in Christ as the Designer in human flesh.

The world of the intellect is not incompatible with Christianity. In fact if one really wants to know God better, growing intellectually smarter is one of the ways in which we not only pursue God but love Him. Let us love the Lord our God with all our minds.⁴

Meditation/Application

Take an inventory of your time. When do you invest time in developing your mind? Consider picking up a book or watching a lecture on YouTube for the sheer joy of worshiping God with your mind rather than simply entertaining yourself.

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for the Cameron family.
- Sing or hum a favourite song in worship (ie. Here I am to Worship, How Great Thou Art, My Lighthouse)

⁴ Matthew 22:37

Saturday February 3rd – Contentment

Reading Daniel 5:13 – 17

“You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else.”

Daniel’s reasons for refusing to accept the king’s gifts and rewards were likely two-fold. First, he had just finished telling the king that his kingdom was coming to an end. Who would want to be the third highest person in a kingdom that has no future?

Secondly, by this time Daniel was an old man. He had the benefit of many years of experience to know that the offers that the king was giving were essentially empty. They would not bring happiness. Ironically, the key to happiness is contentment. Yet we still live in a world madly pursuing happiness.

In the late eighties and early nineties, there were several hundred studies about happiness published each year; by 2014, there were over 10,000 per year. It was an exciting shift for psychology, one that the public immediately responded to. Major media outlets clamored to cover the new research. Soon, entrepreneurs began monetizing it, founding start-ups and programming apps to help ordinary people implement the field’s findings. They were followed by a deluge of celebrities, personal coaches, and motivational speakers, all eager to share the gospel of happiness. According to Psychology Today, in 2000, the number of books published about happiness was a modest fifty. In 2008, that number had skyrocketed to 4,000. Of course, people have always been interested in the pursuit of happiness, but all that attention has made an impact: since the mid-2000s, the interest in happiness, as measured by Google searches, has tripled. “The shortcut to anything you want in your life,” writes author Rhonda Byrne in her bestselling 2006 book *The Secret*, “is to BE and FEEL happy now!”

And yet, there is a major problem with the happiness frenzy: it has failed to deliver on its promise. Though the happiness industry continues to grow, as a society, we’re more miserable than ever.

Indeed, social scientists have uncovered a sad irony—chasing happiness actually makes people unhappy.⁵

As Christians, we are called to live lives that have a kingdom orientation. That means that we live in light of God’s Kingdom values as described throughout Scripture. These values are constantly under threat by the predominant values of society that run contrary to God’s Word. In an age of consumerism and materialism, advertisers are constantly telling us their product will make us happy. The old Puritan preacher, Jeremiah Burroughs, once said, “What a foolish thing is this, that because I have not got what I want, I will not enjoy the comfort of what I have! There is a great deal of folly in a discontented heart.”

Meditation/Application

Take a minute to just look around the room you are presently in and write a list of those things which you take for granted and perhaps have rarely stopped (or perhaps never) to thank God for. Imagine that they were all taken away. What might you wish you had taken the time to enjoy more?

Prayer Points:

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

- Take a stopwatch/timer and set it for 4 minutes? In silence, center your mind/heart on God and the idea of contentment. Ready, set, go.
- Pray for those who will gather tomorrow at the Super-bowl party at Rob Jackett’s home. Ask God that those who attend would noticeably see God in the fellowship and care shown to one another.

⁵ Emily Esfahani Smith, [The Power Of Meaning](#) (Crown, 2017), pages 9-10

Sunday February 4th – Numbered, Weighed, Divided

Reading Read Daniel 5

Sermon Notes:

Thee audiences of Daniel

1. The _____ participants.
 - A warning that the king's life was taken because of _____.
2. The _____.
 - A warning that they _____ from what brought them into exile in the first place.
3. The _____.
 - A warning that we not _____ God by our actions.

Meditation/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 requests:

- World Cancer Day – pray for researchers, cancer patients and survivors that their stories could be told and understood in God's narrative of redemption and restoration.
- 'Going to church' has been confused with being a Christian. Today we gather as the church (a people) in a church (building) to tell and sing about the wondrous love of Jesus together. Request that God's story would abound in our stories.

Monday February 5th – Honouring God

Reading Daniel 5:18 – 23

“But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.”

How do we honour God in our lives? In professional football players have knelt after a touchdown, others have lifted their finger to the sky to try and indicate where the praise should be directed, but is this what honour should look like in our lives?

Is honouring God simply a matter of giving Him credit for those things we do or good fortunes we receive? Or is there more? Often times it is easy to think that honouring God is simply a matter of acknowledging him when things go our way. But what if honouring God is more than that? What if we acknowledge God in everything and at all times? What if God wants us to acknowledge Him in all of our decision-making and honour Him by submitting our wills to His Word?

Manhattan, New York, pastor Tim Keller once said that in 1970 a Sunday school teacher changed his life with a simple illustration.

The teacher said, "Let's assume the distance between the earth and the sun (92 million miles) was reduced to the thickness of this sheet of paper. If that is the case, then the distance between the earth and the nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high. And the diameter of the galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high."

Then Keller's teacher added, "The galaxy is just a speck of dust in the universe, yet Jesus holds the universe together by the Word of his power."

Finally, the teacher asked her students, "Now, is this the kind of person you ask into your life to be your assistant?"⁶

⁶ Timothy Keller, from the sermon "The Gospel and Your Self"

We honour God best when we give Him our whole lives to rule and govern. This is not a one-time event. There is a stubborn tendency to keep taking back control of our lives even after we have asked Him to be Lord. It is this act of giving God honour that makes us more complete as humans. We were made for God's honour.

The ancient theologian, Thomas Aquinas, once wrote, "We pay God honor and reverence, not for his sake (because He is of himself full of glory to which no creature can add anything), but for our own sake."⁷ When we fail to give God honour, it is as if our souls shrink, we become a little less than what we could be and who we should be.

Meditation/Application

Is there an area of your life that you are failing to honour God in? It may be an area of your life where you are withholding control; not willing to do what you know God wants. It may be an area of your life where you are withholding credit; not willing to acknowledge the source of your ability or success. Ask God for the grace you will need to honour God in every area of your life at all times.

Prayer Points:

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

- Pray for several unspoken deep needs of our NBBC family. If you do not know what to say, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Our Youth Drop-ins for the youth in our community happen on Mondays and Tuesdays after school at NBBC. Please pray.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, medieval theologian. *Men of Integrity*, Vol. 1, no. 1.

Tuesday February 6th – Judgment

Reading Daniel 5:24 – 31

*“God has numbered the days of your reign... You have been weighed...
Your kingdom is divided.”*

One day we will all stand before God to give an account of our one and only life. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. One day we stand alone before the One who knows our thoughts and motives, nothing will be hidden from Him and He will judge us. And there is never a time when we are free from God’s all-seeing eye and all-knowing presence; everything we have ever done – or not done – will be up for an account. This is not meant to intimidate but simply to remind us.

Syndicated New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, a keen observer of world trends, devoted a recent column to the idea that technology has made everyone a potential paparazzo.

Friedman explains that anyone we encounter could have a cell phone with a camera that could record our actions. If we're rude or misbehave, we could end up on the offended party's blog or MySpace website for the whole world to see. "We're all public figures now," concludes Friedman.

For support, Friedman cites the new book *How* by Dov Seidman. Its thesis: in this world of new and potentially revealing technology, how we live our lives and conduct our businesses has become far more significant than what we do. "We do not live in glass houses (houses have walls); we live on glass microscope slides...visible and exposed to all," writes Seidman.

What a concept—take great care about how you live your life, because someone is watching. This is news to columnists and authors, but it's hardly a revelation to those who believe in a sovereign, all-seeing God.⁸

⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, "The Whole World Is Watching," New York Times (6-27-07)

The difference between the God who sees us and those who would capture our failings on their cell phone and expose us on YouTube for entertainment is that God will judge us in mercy and compassion. No one will deserve heaven because of the good they have done, but nobody will be denied heaven who trusts in God's son. And He will judge us in light of our standing with Jesus and our response to His Gospel. And that standing, our choice to follow Jesus, will be evident in our actions. Our actions will not save us by their merit but our actions will give indication of our allegiance and obedience to Jesus.

Preparing for your MCG

As you come for you 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.
- 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 Requests:

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

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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 its 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.