

of Following Jesus

772
were walking along the road, a
to him. "I will follow you
you go."
plied, "Foxes have holes and
air have nests, but the Son of
place to lay his head." "Follow me,"
said. "I will follow you."

773
who rejects you rejects me; but he who re-
jects me rejects him who sent me."
The seventy-two returned with joy and
said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us
in your name."
He replied, "I saw Satan fall like light-
ning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you au-
thority to trample on snakes and scorpions
and to overcome all the power of the ene-
my; nothing will harm you. ²⁰However, do

2017 STARTER KIT WEEK 10

ALL PRIESTS UNDER JESUS

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

was about to go. ²He told them,
rest is plentiful, but the workers
lack the Lord of the harvest, there-
fore send out workers into his harvest.
I am sending you out like lambs.
Be shrewd as snakes and as gentle
as doves. ³Do not take a purse or bag
or sandals, and do not greet anyone on the

way. ⁴When you enter a house, first say,
"Peace be to this house." ⁵If a man of peace is
there, peace will rest on him; if not, it
will not. ⁶Stay in that house, eat-
ing and drinking whatever they give you,
for the worker deserves his wages. Do not
move from house to house.

When you enter a town and are wel-
comed, what is set before you. ⁷Heal the
sick there and tell them, "The king-
dom of God is near you." ⁸But when you
are not welcomed, go into the streets
and say, "Even the dust of your feet
sticks to our feet. Wipe it off."
Yet be sure of this: The king-
dom of God is near. ⁹I tell you, it will be
more bearable on that day for Sodom than
for you.

Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you,
Betsaida. For if the miracles that were
performed in you had been performed in
Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented
and been sitting in sackcloth and ashes.
But because you did not repent, you
will be more bearable for Tyre and
Sidon than for you. ¹²And you, Capernaum,
that is exalted above heaven, will be
brought down to the depths. ¹³Who-
ever listens to me will listen to me; he

who rejects me rejects him who sent me."
The seventy-two returned with joy and
said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us
in your name."
He replied, "I saw Satan fall like light-
ning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you au-
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The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²¹On one occasion an expert in the law
stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he
asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal
life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he re-
plied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: "Love the Lord your
God with all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your strength and with all
your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as
yourself." ²⁶

"You have answered correctly," Jesus
replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he
asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going
down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he
fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped
him of his clothes, beat him and went away,
leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened
to be going down the same road, and when
he saw the man, he passed by on the other
side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to
the place and saw him, passed by on the
other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he trav-
eled, came where the man was; and when
he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went
on him and bandaged his wounds, pouring
on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his
own donkey, took him to an inn and took

HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be and done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We general think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind — anything that helps you draw closer to God.

THE STORY

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, DEFORMED AND REFORMED

The story of King Nebuchadnezzar has to be one of the most dramatic transformations in the Bible. First, this king was simply a great military commander. His name means “O Nabu, preserve or defend my firstborn son.” Nabu was the son of the god Marduk, and Nebuchadnezzar probably worshiped him, since he once described himself in an inscription as Nabu’s “beloved” and “favorite.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebuchadnezzar_II (You can find more facts and a picture of a coin from Nebuchadnezzar’s reign on this site.)

Babylon had itself been conquered by the Assyrians who had taken over the northern kingdom of Israel. It was Nebuchadnezzar’s father who delivered them, and Babylon grew to its greatest height under Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. He was different from the Assyrian conquerors, who were renowned for their cruelty and ruthlessness. Nebuchadnezzar also tried to conquer everything he saw, but he believed in allowing his subject states to keep their own religion and even help in their own rule. He probably had good intentions when he brought young nobles like Daniel and his three friends to court to be educated and treated like royalty.

The role of these young men, especially Daniel, in Nebuchadnezzar’s life will not be fully known until heaven. He saw them politely ask to be excused from eating rich, unhealthy (and unclean) food, which he had offered as a compliment. Then he saw them not only complete but excel in their education in the pagan court. They would have learned about astrology and other magic, but it didn’t corrupt them one bit. They stuck to the one true God, praying earnestly to remain faithful no matter what.

Nebuchadnezzar watched all this as the years went by. He found that Daniel did not see the pagans as valueless or irredeemable. He intervened to save the lives of the magicians in Daniel 2 (see verse 24), and all four (and perhaps other faithful Jews we do not know about) did their best to witness to the king.

The vision of the image that showed all the nations through time impressed Nebuchadnezzar deeply. Perhaps the beginnings of reformation inside his heart began here. However, his pride still stood higher than anything else. Dissatisfied with being only the head of gold, he soon created a massive image entirely of gold, and set it up to be worshiped.

The fiery furnace is a notable example of the witness of the godly men in his court. Nebuchadnezzar began to reform. At the end of Daniel 3 we see him making a law that no one can speak against the God of these men, “for no other god can save in this way” (v. 29). Was Nebuchadnezzar beginning to lose faith in Nabu?

Then came the dream in Daniel 4. This time, Nebuchadnezzar did not threaten to kill his magicians. He called Daniel, saying, “I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you.” He still sees many gods, but he can tell Daniel’s is stronger. The reformation continues.

By now Daniel had built such a close relationship with Nebuchadnezzar that when he heard the dream he was upset to think of the king in danger. After he interpreted it, he boldly begged the king to repent of his sins and change his life (Daniel 4:27). Most people probably would have been executed for speaking to the king that way. What does this say about the relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel?

Well, we know the rest of the story—Nebuchadnezzar heeded the warning, but only for a while, and ended up being deformed into living as an animal for seven whole years. Did you ever wonder how his throne was still there for him? Isn’t it likely that Daniel, now in a high position at court, helped to hold it for him?

At any rate, after seven years, Nebuchadnezzar’s reason returned, and how he had reformed completely. He wrote the only chapter of the Bible that we know was written by a pagan (or once pagan) king: Daniel 4. And he ended it by saying, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan. 4:37).

As Ellen White notes on page 521 of *Prophets and Kings*, “This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.”

DEVOTION

Pride. What is it? We use pride in different ways. We may speak of taking pride in our work, or in our appearance. This is a good and healthy thing. All we really mean is to do our best, look our best, and feel satisfied with that rather than putting ourselves down, calling ourselves names, or beating ourselves up for imperfections. Perhaps we should use a different word, like self-respect or dignity. My thesaurus even uses “joy” as a synonym for pride, as in “joy in a job well done.”

In general when speaking of pride, we mean a more negative thing. We mean conceit, or arrogance, or thinking you’re better than everybody else. Nebuchadnezzar had that problem. “Look at this mighty kingdom I have built!” If your joy in a job you have done begins to sound like that, you could be in trouble.

Humility is almost as confusing. Some people would define humble the way we had it in the first paragraph—putting ourselves down, calling ourselves names, or beating ourselves up for imperfections. Humble people, we may think, can’t take a compliment, or think that Christians should be doormats for others to walk on, and never stand up for themselves. Think about what you know of Daniel. Was he “humble” in this way? No. He had the courage to go to the steward and ask for different food from the rest.

Let’s look at some Bible texts about pride and humility. (Read or have read the following verses.)

1. PRIDE:

In its negative sense, it’s easy to find lots of examples in any concordance.

Proverbs 16:18 is perhaps the most famous.

- 2 Chron. 26:16
- Esther 5:9
- Psalm 31:18

But we can find positive ones, too.

- 2 Chronicles 17:6
- Isaiah 4:2

What kind of pride is depicted in these two verses?

2. HUMILITY

- Proverbs 15:33
- Proverbs 22:4
- Zephaniah 2:3
- Eph. 4:2
- Col. 4:12

Discuss what conclusions the group comes to concerning pride, humility, and how to obtain the right kinds and stay away from the wrong kinds.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

Have three or four volunteers demonstrate something they do well, such as play an instrument, sing, do an athletic action, or show any talent or ability.

After each one, have others applaud them, then let the performers model different ways of responding. Each can choose whether to act arrogant and prideful, (“Yeah, I was pretty great, wasn’t I?”) or timid and self-effacing, saying, “It was nothing,” or “I didn’t do it very well,” or concentrating on the mistakes they made or things they wish they’d done differently.

Then let the others help them with suggestions of language that would be humble but still show satisfaction and joy in their accomplishment, as well as gratitude to God for giving them this ability.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body+heart+mind=one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: *Reread the first four chapters of Daniel*, making notes on the changes Nebuchadnezzar goes through. What do you think helped or hindered these changes? At what point do you think Nebuchadnezzar was truly reformed? Did Daniel go through any changes during that same time?

DAY TWO: Heart. *Read 2 Kings 24:14-16.* This is most likely when Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon. Think of a powerful country that is or could be an enemy to your country. What if you were taken away and made to live as a servant of that country's ruler while your own land was laid waste? Some countries today have experienced this sort of thing; perhaps you know what it is like to be a refugee in a strange land. Write about how you would feel (or how you do feel if it is true of you.) How do you maintain your identity as a child of God in these circumstances? Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: Mind. *Do some research on the political realities where you live.* Can you think of ways God wants you to be active in upholding His glory and helping His vulnerable people? How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: Strength/body. *Reread Dan. 1:5, 8-20.* What kinds of foods was Daniel willing to eat? How close is your diet to this idea? Are there ways you could reform your eating and other health habits? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY FIVE: Soul/spirit. *Consider Daniel and his friends' prayer life, as depicted in Daniel 2:1-23; 3:16-18.* What do you think are the factors that made them able to stand firm in fearful circumstances? As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, seek to strengthen your own spiritual life like theirs.

DAY SIX: Within your family, community, and church, do you see some of the factors at work which you have studied this week, such as pride or humility, strong prayer lives, health principles, or a tendency to lord it over others as Nebuchadnezzar did? Pray for some ways you can help to strengthen positive tendencies and reduce negative ones.

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned. Write a poem or song or story. Create a poster. Write a letter. Paint or draw a picture. Make a sign. Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings. Build something. Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s). Make food and give it to someone in need. Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

THE PROCESS: ONE MAN'S CHANGE

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A SHORT SKIT (ABOUT 10-15 MINUTES)

This is a short skit in three acts, based on Nebuchadnezzar's deformation and reformation. Have the players do their best to imitate the changes strongly. Note that Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel by his pagan name, Belteshazzar. For some reason, we have fallen into the habit of calling Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah by their pagan names of Sharach, Meshach, and Abednego, but I believe it is better to use their godly names, as we do with Daniel. In this case, though, since it is the king speaking, we will let him use the name he knew. I have taken the liberty of having him use "Daniel" at the end when he recognizes the sovereignty of God.

CHARACTERS

1. Nebuchadnezzar
2. Servant
3. Daniel (Belteshazzar)
4. Angelic Watcher (someone with a powerful voice)
5. Other courtiers or servants if they want to help "herd" the king out to the field
6. Scribe

PROPS

1. Designate one area as the king's chamber in Act 1 and the rooftop in Act 2.
2. Let the other side of the room be the outdoors, unless you do this skit outside.
3. For Act 3, it would be good to have a table or desk with a chair, and paper and pen.

Act 1

Nebuchadnezzar (pacing his room. A **servant** stands nearby. **Daniel** is waiting in the wings, or sitting on a chair in the front row.) I've had the most terrible dream! (Clutches his head.) I'm sure it means something, but I don't know what! My magicians are useless. (Turns to servant.) You, there! Go send for Belteshazzar!

Servant (bows) Yes, your majesty. (Hurries to get **Daniel**, who comes to the king. Servant can leave, or stand in the background as the king and Daniel talk.)

Daniel (bows) You wanted me, your majesty?
(As Nebuchadnezzar tells his dream, Daniel should be looking more and more worried.)

Nebuchadnezzar

Oh, Belteshazzar, I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you, and mysteries don't baffle you. Please explain my dream to me. I dreamed that I saw a great tree, so huge that it filled the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit was abundant. All the animals found shade under it, and the birds lived in it, and all living things fed from its fruit. So far, it was a good dream! (He looks troubled and shakes his head.) But then, an angelic watcher came down from heaven, and he shouted out, "Cut down the tree, chop off its fruit and branches, and let all the birds and animals flee! But leave the stump with a band of iron and bronze around it." (He hesitates.) And then—then he suddenly stopped saying "it" and started saying "he" as if the tree was a person! He said, "Let him get wet with dew, and share with the animals, and let his human mind be taken from him and let him be given an animal mind" (getting more and more upset) *"for seven times!"* I remember his last words perfectly: "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men."

Daniel

(turns away and walks up and down once, looking very worried)

Nebuchadnezzar Belteshazzar, don't let the dream or its interpretation upset you. Tell me the truth. (He, too, should react visibly as Daniel explains the dream.)

Daniel (turning back to him) Oh, my lord, if only this dream was about your enemies! The meaning is this: the tree is you and your kingdom, which now has responsibility for the whole known world. But the angelic watcher's decree, which is really a judgment from heaven, is that you be driven away from human habitation and live like an animal in the sun and rain, grazing with the cattle, for seven years until you realize the only real ruler is the Most High God. *He* is the one who sets up rulers and has given you this kingdom. But there is hope. The band was left on the stump to tell you that you can regain your reason and your kingdom once you recognize God's sovereignty.

Nebuchadnezzar *shows that he is appalled and frightened.*

Daniel (earnestly) Please, oh king, listen to my advice. Break away from your sins! Do right and show mercy to the poor. Maybe there will be a prolonging of your prosperity and you could escape the judgment of this dream.

Daniel and the king sit down; servant too, if still there.

[You could have a narrator say, "One year later."]

Act 2

(Angelic watcher is at back of room.)

Nebuchadnezzar (goes back to what now represents the rooftop and paces, but this time proudly and arrogantly, pretending to look out over his city. He speaks as if he thinks he's the greatest thing ever.) What a view! Isn't this Babylon the great, which *I* have built as *my* own royal residence, by *my* own power and for the glory of *my* majesty?

Angelic watcher (interrupts right at "majesty," booms out sternly) "King Nebuchadnezzar!"

Nebuchadnezzar (jumps and looks around, then upward, frightened; he continues to get more upset as he listens, continuing to look up as if the voice is coming from heaven.)

Angelic watcher To you it is declared: your sovereignty is removed. You will be driven away from people to live with animals. You will be given grass to eat for seven years (even more sternly) *until you recognize and admit that the Most High is the true Ruler and gives kingdoms wherever He wishes!*

Nebuchadnezzar (wails) Oh, no, no! (Then changes into a beast-like creature—the actor can make as much of this as he likes, so long as he doesn't make it a farce. He ends up on his hands and knees, acting like an animal, and Daniel, the servant, and some others if any want to, come and herd the king out to the "field." Others may mock or act shocked or whatever they think might have happened, but Daniel is compassionate and sorrowful, trying to help the king as much as he can.)

Allow some time to pass, with Nebuchadnezzar acting like he's grazing, scratching himself, sleeping curled up on the floor, and generally acting like an animal. If you wish, you can have Daniel visiting and trying to watch over him.

[You could have someone say, "Seven years later."]

Act 3

Nebuchadnezzar (suddenly comes to himself, looks around in shock, then stands up and hangs his head in shame. He looks up to heaven humbly) O Most High God! I praise and honor You who live forever!

Daniel (sees the king and rushes to him) O king, are you all right?

Nebuchadnezzar (quietly) Yes, I'm all right. My reason has returned to me. I am ashamed, Daniel. You were right. I was arrogant. God's kingdom endures from generation to generation, and He does anything He wishes. People count for nothing. Least of all myself. I don't deserve to be king.

Daniel Well, you are still king, o lord. God has held your throne for you for seven years.

Nebuchadnezzar Really? God is merciful! Will you help me to get cleaned up? I want to write a proclamation.

(On their way to the desk or table, they make motions showing Daniel cleaning up and re-robing Nebuchadnezzar. The scribe goes to the table and takes up pen and paper, waiting.)

Nebuchadnezzar (to scribe) Write this. He thinks for a second, then begins to proclaim, while scribe writes.)

"Nebuchadnezzar to all the peoples of the earth: May your peace abound! It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation."