



Small Group Series

Small Group 1: Reclaiming Dignity

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

What's the most valuable thing you own?

How do we determine what has value, how much value and what doesn't? What about people? What about Black people in America? (Given where you are, use examples from that city, state, campus, or section of the country to affirm or reveal the perceived level of value of Black people there).

CONTEXT

The Denial of Dignity

How have you seen the denial of dignity given to the marginalized people in America today?

- List the shootings (Reference the names of the babies on the PROXE)
- The blindfolded people in the PROXE
- The people walking on chains in the PROXE could easily be a reference for mass incarceration

BACKGROUND

The Babylonian army crushed the Egyptian army at Carchemish (Jeremiah 46:2)

- 1 The Babylonian army was led by Nebuchadnezzar
- 2 At that time Nebuchadnezzar was crowned King of Babylon
- 3 Nebuchadnezzar quickly conquered the whole region
- 4 Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. (Daniel 1:1)
 - As a result: Jehoiakim surrender his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar
 - The first Hebrews were deported to Babylon
 - A generation of young Hebrew leadership was taken away
 - Babylon's agenda was to diminish and erase the importance of the Hebrew God and culture

MAIN IDEA

In our text tonight, we meet the Hebrew captives in Babylon – including Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah - who had the value of their lives questioned. The people had just been carried off like they were property. Being a stranger in another place, everything they called valuable was now worthless. But they held onto their dignity, because they recognized that their dignity didn't come from people or possessions, but from God. Daniel, **Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah's ability to maintain their dignity in spite of their captivity allowed them to influence the Babylonian culture.**

As we read this text, think about how Daniel's dignity was denied.



MAIN PASSAGE: Daniel 1:3-16

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. 5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.



MAIN POINTS

1. What are specific elements of value from the Hebrew culture that were now considered worthless?
 - note the significance of the name change in v.7 (slave names)
 - Daniel = God is my Judge; to Belteshazzar meaning "Bel protect the King" and Bel was a Babylonian god
 - Hananiah = God is Gracious; to Shadrach meaning "command of Aku" a Babylonian moon god
 - Mishael = who is like God; to Meshach meaning who is what Aku is
 - Azariah = God helps; to Abednego meaning the servant of the god of wisdom Nebo
2. What does "dignity" mean?
 - Define "Dignity" (Lives) from Scripture – We bear God's image; Imago Dei – image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) thus we all have value and meaning. Divine Dignity
3. In what ways does Daniel and his friends affirm aspects of truth within the Babylonian culture without compromising their dignity? Reconcile without assimilation
4. What impact does their stance make on the Babylonian culture?
5. How can you begin to affirm certain aspects of truth within your culture without compromising your dignity?
6. What areas in your life do you need to "resolve not to defile" yourself? On campus?
7. In what ways can an historical marginalized nation (African-Americans) positively impact American culture? For Christ?

ACTIVE RESPONSE

Cut out a face shaped mask from a sheet of paper. On the inside of the mask, write out aspects about yourself that may deny your dignity (such as: self-hatred, shame, regret, depression, addiction, etc.) On the outside of the mask, write out resolutions you decide to commit to in order to not to defile your dignity. (such as: "I will thank God every day this week that I am fearfully and wonderfully made in his image" or "I will pray for the Black community on campus every day this week", etc.) Share this with a close friend/accountability partner. Encourage them to do the same. to become like the world to be influential. Despite the fact that this world is full of racism, we do not have to conform to the divisive racists agenda, but rather live transformational with excellence like Daniel. (Romans 12:1-2).



Small Group 2: Embracing Our Identity

INTRODUCTION

Have you noticed the continued growth of 'whitewashed' movies? Remember The Ten Commandments? The old one? Yeah, that was in Egypt. Not one main black cast member. Exodus: God's and Kings featured white Egyptians rulers and black Egyptian slaves. The Great Wall (2017), significant to China's history, just came out starring Matt Damon—and Chinese people weren't happy. (feel free to reference any other movies with similar qualities)

CONTEXT

In this small group, we will discuss the impact of identity on culture. The BLACK cultural identity has African roots. God birthed each black person on purpose within a specific cultural design. Not merely to assimilate, but to affirm the Black experience.

How do you see the Black cultural identity fractured in American?

In American entertainment, and how we view Scripture, we don't take into account the cultural context. Content is just as important as context. The people in Scripture were from different countries, ethnic backgrounds, and spoke different languages—on purpose. Rev. 7:9 says we will be in heaven where people from every tribe, tongue, and language will be present. That means in God's kingdom, no one culture is superior over another. **The ONE culture is kingdom culture, and within that is the broad diversity we see in the world.**

As we read this passage, consider the fears Nebuchadnezzar may have about his culture becoming fractured. *Summarize Daniel 2:1-25 in your own words.



MAIN PASSAGE: Daniel 2:26-49

26 The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”

27 Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these:

29 “As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. 30 As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

31 “Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. 32 The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 34 While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

36 “This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. 37 Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.



39 "After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. 40 Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. 41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. 42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

"The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. 49 Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Daniel affirm his cultural heritage?
2. How do you see 'a divided kingdom' (v.41) today? Within the black culture? Across America?
3. What impact does division have on the identity of the marginalized?
*note – some historians and scholars believe many other Hebrews captured with Daniel possibly assimilated so much to Babylonian culture, that they lost their identity
4. How does Daniel's interpretation impact the Babylonian culture/kingdom?
5. How does Daniel use his identity to celebrate and honor God?
6. How can the Black voice celebrate and honor God?
7. How does your culture "fit" into the kingdom culture?
8. What is the significance of the rock "not cut by human hands"? (v.44-45)
9. How do you see the "kingdom culture" surprising time, geography, etc.?

CALL TO FAITH

(feel free to use a pocket proxie mural or draw the 4 circles)

The only kingdom that has lasted beyond the Babylonian culture, the Roman empire, the Greeks, and yes even beyond America is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is designed to stand up for justice in the midst of systemic injustice and division within certain earthly kingdoms. We can see the brokenness and pain within our world (Circle 2 – refer to injustice, brutality, death etc. left side of mural) But God created the world to be whole and well. That's why we long for a better world full of hope (Circle 1). Therefore, Jesus is the incarnation of the promise in v. 44-45. Jesus offers hope in the midst of racial injustice and pain (circle 3 – center of mural). Some of the greatest social movements of the world came out of the teachings & resources of Jesus. For Jesus followers, pursuing justice with Jesus is living into & proclaiming our future hope (Circle 4 – right side of mural). This is why we let others know about Jesus & what he has done. We want to join God's movement of hope and justice.

Where do you see yourself?

1. Where do you feel stuck or hopeless for change in your personal life? Are there ways that you feel hopeless when you think about the suffering in Black America? (left side of mural, then ask) Let's invite Jesus into our hopelessness, ask him to lead our lives, and let him transform us from the inside out?

or

2. We need Jesus' power to see the kind of transformation in our world that we long for. Would you like more of Jesus' power in your life? Let's invite Jesus' Spirit to empower us to seek justice, live in his ways, and communicate his good news, on campus and in our world. (middle of mural, then ask)

Would you join our community as we work together on this?



Small Group 3: Declare Significance!

ICE BREAKER

Why do you think people used the terms “#blacklivesmatter” or “#bluelivesmatter” or “#alllivesmatter”?

How should your faith influence your culture, rather than your culture influence your faith?

*For Further reading *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*

by: Lamén Sanneh

1. Jesus is the only One who perfects our culture, rather than trying to colonize it. He incarnates—showing our beauty and revealing our flaws.
2. Christianity is the only faith that doesn't change a culture but perfects it. To be Christian first is to be Black the way God intended you to be.



MAIN PASSAGE: DANIEL 3:8-30

8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! 10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the



blazing furnace. 22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.



ACTIVITY: (Choose one of the following)

- Draw an album cover, with track listing to summarize this passage
- Write a poem illustrating the emotional instability of King Nebuchadnezzar

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What elements of worship are illustrated in this passage? Idol worship?
2. What principles mattered to Nebuchadnezzar?
3. What principles mattered to the Hebrew boys?
4. How does the Hebrews' faith impact the Babylonian culture?
5. What does it take to be willing to die for something that matters?
6. How should the Christian faith impact your culture?
7. How should you and/or your culture respond to the current issues of Black America? (police brutality, mass incarceration, systemic injustice, socio-economic discrimination, etc.) * for further reading check out Sean M. Watkins' blog "Reflections on Being a Black Man in America"
8. How have you seen the church response to this?
9. Does your cultural background/ethnicity affect this response? Why or why not?
10. Does your spiritual background affect this response? Why or why not?

ACTIVE RESPONSE:

Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah trusted God in spite of the obstacles, allowing them to begin a social movement against idol worship. What are the idols on your campus? (An idol can refer to anything that draws our allegiance or devotion.) What are ways you can challenge the idolatrous culture on your campus?

Plan a day to share your faith through the Better World Pocket Proxe; and restart this 3-week small group series with 3 of your friends. Who do you want to invite? Write their names here, and pray for them.

by Sean Michael Watkins, Jamal Morris, & Jason "Smiley" Abrams