



EXILES

A TEACHING SERIES ON DANIEL

LIFE GROUP LEADERS NOTES

CATCH UP ONLINE AT WWW.KINGS.CHURCH/TEACHING

Have you ever wondered why you feel like things aren't the way they're supposed to be? You don't really feel at home, even in your own body. You're met with intolerance, sometimes with hostility for your values and beliefs. There's a pressure to conform to the way people around you live. You find deep down a yearning for a better world, where everything is as it's meant to be — society, work, relationships, even nature? ...you're not alone!

The people of Israel had the same feeling when, after their repeated failure to keep their covenant faithfulness to God, they ended up in exile. And even after they returned to their homeland they were not able to live like free people, they were still exiles. That's one reason why we have the book of Daniel, named after its main characters, to show us how we can live in covenant faithfulness to God, even when we're in exile. If, like Daniel, you will not return "home" during your earthly lifetime, there's a way of living in uncompromising faithfulness to God, whilst working for the good of the place you live in, despite its hostility. God honoured that kind of attitude, and he still does today.

Therefore, studying the theme of exile today is relevant for any follower of Jesus, as we can draw from the wisdom and hope that the Scriptures provide. We too are exiles, citizens of a Kingdom that has not yet fully come, living in this dark and hostile empire called the "world", where we have homes, jobs, duties, friends, leisure, but also hostility, pressure, suffering, loneliness and sometimes even persecution. But we are more exiles in time than in geography, living in the "now and not yet" of Jesus' reign.

You will find it helpful to look at what the empire does to its subjects, what the faithful covenant people do and what God does in each instance. In your Groups, strive to see what was non-negotiable to Daniel and his friends and what was acceptable, as this will equip you for your journey of faith, in your job, family, neighborhood, society and even online! Some of us are very public figures, most of us are not — still, the principles apply.

Our aim in this endeavor is to follow Jesus, who went through the exile, the furnace, the lion's den, but never compromised and promised to one day make all things right, just as they're meant to be. Our hope is to be called faithful at the end of our lives, and then wake up to the new and good world, that we long for, where home will be home — paradise regained, heaven on earth.

Like Daniel, who had his friends with him, we have ours in the local church and in our groups. People with whom we can journey together, encouraging one another and looking out for one another, so that no one is lost on the way, especially when the going gets tough.

USE THE SUN TO NAVIGATE YOUR JOURNEY:

SEE IT! — UNDERSTAND IT! — NAIL IT!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR We're thrilled to have Jurgen with us who has recently moved from Brasov, Romania with his family and attends our Centro venue. He is on the teaching team at Kings and has kindly written much of the content for our Exiles life group notes.

1. *LIVING WITHOUT COMPROMISE*

DANIEL
1:1-21

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 1:1-21.

See the friends in exile, in the enemy's land, with the pressure to change and conform to the empire. They are to be re-educated, re-dressed, re-dieted, re-named. They were fine with everything but one: the food. Why? Because that's where they would have broken their covenant loyalty to God, losing their identity as children of Israel. Daniel and his friends held to their conscience — God gave them strength and favour. They walked a more difficult path but were the best at what they did.

UNDERSTAND IT!

Even exiles should actively seek the good of the place they live, using their training, skills and energy to bless the people they live among. Yet when it comes to ultimate allegiance, God will not be replaced. It probably isn't food today, but certain behavior that is at odds with our Christian lifestyle. This is where Jesus, our Lord, calls us not to conform. We should live to bless the world around us, not conform to it.

NAIL IT!

Make sure you "resolve". No need to attack, just hold your ground and do what's right. At work, things you are asked to do, paying taxes, etc.

- *Spend some time giving examples of your own challenges.
Choose the more difficult path, if you need to.*

It may mean changing your job or career, which might disadvantage you financially. You may have to work harder, lose some "friends", become unpopular etc. This is where we need each other to encourage and stand with us as we make decisions to live right as Christians in our exile. Don't grumble, take it to God.

It is Him you're loyal to, He understands and loves you. Remember Jesus walked the path and still does with you. He knows your pain and frustrations.

- *Spend some time praying for each other that you will have the strength and courage to make the right decisions everyday you live as exiles in this world.*

Stick it out with your friends. Create an environment of trust and loyalty with others in your group, so you can talk stuff through, pray about it and perhaps practically support each other with the challenges you face! Be on the front foot, ready to make a stand for Christ.

2. *THE TRIUMPH OF THE KINGDOM*

DANIEL
2:1-49

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 2:1-49.

This is the stuff of nightmares, right? Not just the dream, but the challenge it posed to Daniel and all the counselors of the king. Daniel's trust in God, his friends' solidarity and God's action bring it to a happy ending for all involved, but it's really about something bigger — God's kingdom eventually prevailing against all human, powerful and evil empires that exalt themselves against Him.

UNDERSTAND IT!

This must have inspired lots of hope in Daniel and his friends who felt the pain of living as exiles — it won't last forever; however invincible it looks now! The image of the empire, the idol representing its strength — political, economic, military — was crushed by the rolling in of God's kingdom. This kingdom of God was to last forever and no other kingdom would prevail against it. That meant they could make the best of the present in view of the future hope they had.

NAIL IT!

Make sure you are certain of your citizenship of the kingdom of heaven as a child of God, just as you are as an exile in the world now. Being a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven is what matters. Don't fret about the present systems of the world that are against your values, as a follower of Jesus, they won't last.

- *Talk about what it means for you to live in the world but not of it.*
- *Name some of the overwhelming things you face.*
- *Pray for God's Kingdom to come, more fully in your lives, just as Jesus taught us. (Matthew 6:9,10)*
- *Act on it in view of the certainty we have about its final victory.*

It's good to name things you want to see "smashed" by God's kingdom, ie. poverty, injustice, abuse, corruption etc. Imagine ways you and your friends can be part of the solution, rather than the problem. *Discuss.*

3. *TESTED BY FIRE*

DANIEL
3:1-30

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 3:1-30.

After they give you food, education and jobs, empires will then demand your allegiance. In this case, it meant worshiping the image that represents its power and grandeur. This was in stark conflict with the Judean beliefs, of course, but this time it was a matter of life and death! They asserted their conviction that God can save, but ultimately it wasn't about being saved, but being faithful. And then, they were saved. Fascinating how "a son of gods" (V25) was with them in the fire!

In the end they were better off than when they started, but their faith was literally tested by fire. They didn't take a stance of violent rebellion against the system, but rather limited cooperation. Non-violent resistance.

UNDERSTAND IT!

There are times when our faith will be tested — fiery times. And it might come from the ones around us, in society, in our workplace, social media or even through family demanding us to fall in line, to pledge our allegiance to the idols of the world. These influences attempt to get to the core of who we are. Our appearance, social status, popularity... you name it. The stakes are high and not complying is costly. But, we must never forget we have the Son of God with us, the King of the everlasting Kingdom. And also our Christian brothers and sisters. We are never alone in this!

NAIL IT!

Resolve not to bow, not even under pressure, to the contemporary idols of the "world"- empire. Jesus is our King! Resolve to stand firm before it comes to the confrontation.

- *Take turns to name the idols you feel pressurised to bow before. Know your enemy!*
- *Make sure you have good friends with you, don't try to do it alone. Encourage each other regularly, do not succumb. It will cost you something, maybe everything, but Jesus is in it with you, he will help you through!*
- *If that's your situation, ask the group to walk through it with you. Stay connected.*
- *Celebrate once you come out the other side, make known the saving power of Jesus in the fire. Maybe you have a story to tell already. Encourage the group?*

4. *THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD*

DANIEL
4:1-37

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 4:1-37.

Daniel is called again to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It is about him again, but it's not very good news. His arrogance will bring him down to a beast-like existence, just as the empire he rules is likened to a beast, later in the story. The God of heaven did it, as Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself, he was restored. Eventually the king is reinstated and Yahweh, the God of the Jews, gets all the glory.

It is important to see that Daniel wasn't happy for the king's punishment, he even used the wisdom he gained over time to suggest a way out — a radical change of life!

UNDERSTAND IT!

What does it have to do with the life of an exile?

Leave it to God to deal with the oppressor and the proud! Our part is to bless them and, if possible suggest they turn to God and repent. God will take care of his glory and not share it with any empire, king, idol or power.

We must understand that we are also prone to become proud, unjust and merciless, taking credit when we shouldn't!

NAIL IT!

Always leave it to God to vindicate you, the church or anything that He is involved in.

- *Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in the understanding of His sovereignty, even though it goes against the grain of our human thinking.*
- *Surround yourself with people like Daniel, who will lovingly point out to you when you're in danger of becoming proud or arrogant. Repent and change.*
- *Share with the group your experience of being tempted to vindicate yourself, or to be proud. Pray about it before you go home. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew your thinking, to help you change.*

5. *THE TIME IS SHORT*

DANIEL
5:1-31

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 5:1-31.

Belshazzar is Nebuchadnezzar's son, the new king, but he didn't learn the lessons of his father's history, so he repeats the same mistakes. His utter arrogance towards God and the worship of his empire's idols means there is no possibility that he will humble himself and change. His kingdom is lost in a single day — the kingdom, the boast, even his life. Yet Daniel, the faithful exile, (who didn't participate in the idolatrous feast), survived to tell the tale.

UNDERSTAND IT!

This story shows us that eventually God will deal with all human systems that elevate themselves against Him. Their time is short, but for the loyal covenant people it's just more proof that eventually God's reign will prevail. We remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream and knew it was coming. God keeps his promises and that makes our hope secure and our non-violent resistance strong.

We see that however much a society worships its national and cultural idols, God will bring them all to ruin.

NAIL IT!

- *What are the national, cultural and online idols that elevate themselves in God's place demanding our attention and devotion? Name some that you see.*

Are we in danger of honouring them more than we should, and with much of society around us, forget about God's supremacy? Remember that God will vindicate his Name and there's not always a second chance.

- *Talk about ways to non-violently resist the pressure and demands you face in your job, school, circle of peers or online.*
- *Pray together for wisdom to act faithfully, and for the power to persevere and resist. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you daily of the hope you have in an everlasting Kingdom where Jesus is King and forever reigns.*

6. *LIVING WITHOUT FEAR*

DANIEL
6:1-28

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 6:1-28.

Under a different empire, Daniel is continuing to work with excellence in his job and therefore gets a promotion. His envious colleagues suggest to the King that he makes a new rule — if anyone does not pray to him only, they shall be killed. They knew that Daniel would not be able to obey this rule and therefore he would be executed for disobeying.

Rather than switching his allegiance from Yahweh to King Darius, he fearlessly continues to pray to his God. He ends up in the lion's den, but gets out alive, unharmed and vindicated. God was with him and delivered him. The King decrees that all the nation shall worship the God of Daniel.

UNDERSTAND IT!

Empires change, evil doesn't — but neither does God. If we remain loyal to our God, he will prove himself to be our Deliverer and Saviour. He might not get us out of trouble, but He certainly goes with us through it. Exiles may live in evil empires, but they belong and live according to the Kingdom of their covenant. The kind of fearlessness Daniel showed, comes from God's Spirit, who also empowers us today. There may come times when it might be more convenient, even life-saving, to hide our devotion to Jesus, yet God will honour our covenant faithfulness. Most of the time it requires a supernatural battle, as in Daniel's case, but that's our God's specialty!

NAIL IT!

- *When people envy you and recognise you have a special favour upon you, and as a result they want to bring you down... what do you do?*
- *What can you learn from Daniel's experience? Try and apply it to your situation. Give a personal example if you can.*
- *Think about situations where it is more convenient for you to hide your faith, at work, at school, in the public space or online. Take turns in your group and name the biggest threat for you.*
- *Pray together for perseverance and ask the Holy Spirit to empower you. Ask God to deliver you from these battles, but even if you walk through them, be assured that he is with you all the way. He will bring you through, unharmed. He will!*

7. *THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN*

DANIEL
7:1-28

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 7:1-28.

We get to peek into some very graphic dreams that the prophet had. Fortunately, he also had an explanation, so we can enjoy it! We see again, four empires, eventually stripped of their power to make room for an everlasting Kingdom that comes from God. These Kingdoms are pictured as beasts, characteristic of any human rule that elevates itself in God's place, ferocious, destructive and very boastful.

Then an intriguing figure, The Son of Man is introduced, and receives from God worldwide dominion, glory and an everlasting kingdom. The saints, the people of God, seem to be defeated, but are not really, and they receive this kingdom too.

UNDERSTAND IT!

Understandably, Daniel, as an exile and subject to various empires, was wondering how much longer they will last. God showed him that eventually all of them will crumble. But it will happen when The Son of Man reigns globally. When he does, His Kingdom will last forever. It's fascinating that Jesus saw himself as the Son of Man, coming back one day on the clouds (Luke 21:27). Exiles need this kind of hope, and God lovingly provides it for them.

NAIL IT!

Do today's nation-empires, cultures, ideologies and social-media seem beast-like to you? Do they exalt themselves against God and Jesus' followers?

- *Name some examples that come to mind.*
- *Have you experienced the empire like oppression yourself? Would you share your story to encourage those in your group, so you can support each other?*
- *Take turns and share the promises belonging to the new Kingdom — paradise restored. It will build up your faith and perseverance and keep your hope alive.*
- *Pray for each other, ask how you can walk alongside those in your group. Maybe pray for Christians in other places, who are persecuted, to not lose hope in the coming of Jesus, the Son of Man.*

8. *THE POWER OF PRAYER*

DANIEL
9:1-27

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 9:1-27.

We see Daniel preoccupied with the duration and the cause of the exile. He was studying Scripture, thinking and praying. It's very helpful to see how he prayed and learn from him how to pray ourselves. He identified with his corrupt nation. He named the sins and shortcomings that caused their exile and fasted, to underline his earnestness. He pleads for mercy, based on God's character of mercy and forgiveness. He said: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not..." God called him "greatly loved" and gave him understanding.

UNDERSTAND IT!

We learn that the basic understanding of our universe and circumstances can be found in the Bible. We need to know them and then act based on our understanding. Talking to God in prayer is a major part of Christian life that we so often neglect. Prayer is supposed to be honest, pleading where needed, but most importantly based on a firm grasp of God's mercy and righteousness, as opposed to our performance. Simply put — Grace!

Processing our reading and thinking before God in prayer, will eventually make us grow in our understanding, both of God and our circumstances. And He will answer our cries and eventually act.

Exiles actively intervene for the final victory of good!

NAIL IT!

- *How does our nation today rebel against God? What are the shortcomings we should ask forgiveness for? Discuss these with your group.*
- *Am I a part of the problem? Do I personally need to repent?*
- *It would be good to apply some of it: Pray! Agree on some specific sin or rebellion of our nation and pray with someone applying what we've learned: name it, ask God to forgive, remind Him that you base your plea on his perfectly good character – his mercy and righteousness.*
- *Pray for the Kingdom of heaven to come fully on earth, for Jesus to return and make all things whole again, to end our exile forever.*

9. RESURRECTION HOPE

DANIEL
12:1-13

SEE IT!

Get a few people to read aloud the passage for this week, Daniel 12:1-13.

This is the last chapter and, unsurprisingly it deals with the end times. We have journeyed with Daniel, through his exile and have learned so much. But how will it end?

We learn that after some intense trouble, there will be eternal glory. We are introduced to the concept of the resurrection of the body, a fair judgment and names written in books, about retribution and rewards and about an eternal final state.

Before the end though, there will be a massive polarization of good and evil, but there will be “many” changing sides, purifying themselves to belong to God’s holy people. Daniel is encouraged to persevere in exile and to endure all the way to the end, when God’s people will be delivered, and all exiles will return home.

UNDERSTAND IT!

This passage is meant to point the reader to the bigger picture, where God will eventually make all things right, forever. That includes getting everyone back to life again!

We see that our turning to God, our wise life of faithfulness, our helping others to turn and live right, does matter. There are records of our names and deeds, that make all the difference. Those in exile are encouraged to persevere and keep the end in mind. This hope of the resurrection has become mainstream thinking in some of the later Judaism, but clearly through Jesus’ teaching and it is our hope and strong encouragement! That final moment will end our exile and bring us home, where we belong. Forever.

NAIL IT!

- *Do you see signs of polarization between good and evil? Give some examples from your job, school, politics or social media. Which one is most discouraging?*
- *Discuss how the hope of the good end can help you persevere in your faith. Pray together for God’s Spirit to help you persevere in doing good, in the face of adversity.*
- *What are practical ways to help others to “purify themselves”, to change sides, to turn to God? How can those in your group join in the task?*
- *Resolve to remember Jesus, who inaugurated the end by His resurrection, who promised to get us there too. Thank Him together for the hope we have, praise and worship Him!*