

Can I trust God...?

Introduction

This series is a part of a wider theme as a church over the next few months as we look at what it means to be Christian disciples in the world today. In a world which encourages us to segment our lives into separate parts, it can be tempting to think of discipleship as something that is just done within church groups or on our own. But following Jesus has to be worked out in every part of our lives –public and private, in the workplace, at school, at home or on the streets. Sometimes it involves being part of the prevailing culture and sometimes it means challenging it. Sometimes it makes us popular and sometimes we'll be hated for it.

Hopefully, over the next few months and years, we'll learn to trust God more, be more faithful in following him and encourage others to do the same. As we do, I'm confident that we will discover more of his trustworthiness and faithfulness to us.

The front page of the September magazine will give you a general introduction to the theme of this set of Growth Group Notes. The first sermon on 4th September will give you a bit more of the context within the history of the Old Testament.

We're looking at a few specific chapters from the book of Daniel in which Daniel and his friends have to work out what it means to make tough decisions in unfamiliar circumstances. Whilst we will cover chapter 2 in the sermon series, we are not generally covering the themes of visions, dreams and prophecy that also run through the book. These could fill a series in their own right... maybe one for the future?!

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Oct 2011



Can I trust God...?

1: ...when the world is changing?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each share: Over the summer, do you think your Christian faith has strengthened, weakened or stayed the same? Why & how?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Together or in 2s-3s, give thanks for good things that happened since you last met. Then commit the next few months to God – praying that your faith would be strengthened as individuals, as a group and as a church.

WORD

For a bit of historical background to Daniel, first **read 2 Chronicles 36:5-10** (exact details of dates are complicated for Daniel –but . Someone may have a bit more background info in their Bibles to share.

Read Daniel 1

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

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- In those times, many people assumed that the victory of one nation over another showed that their 'national gods' were superior. What do verses 1&2 reveal about how God works?
- These events had a huge impact on the Israelite people and the surrounding area. Spend a few minutes together listing on paper as many answers as you can to the question 'What major changes do you see happening in the UK today?' Then discuss 'How should we respond as Christians?'
- Daniel and his colleagues were probably young teenagers at this time. What changes, challenges and opportunities did they have to adjust to personally? How do you think they felt about these?
- Daniel decided to make a stand on a particular issue (v8) for his beliefs (he would have had to eat types of meat forbidden by God and offered to idols). Have you ever decided to make a stand for a matter of Christian principle? What happened?
- Daniel's stand involved giving up something (a type of fast). Is there anything you think it would be a good idea for you to decide to give up or reduce that would help you follow God more closely?
- Daniel was respectful but persistent in dealing with the official and then trying the guard. Can you imagine situations where a similar approach to those in authority might be needed today?
- God is mentioned several times in the story. What part does he play? How does this match with your experience of how God works?

WHAT NEXT?

- Pray for our nation during changes happening locally or globally.
- Pray for young people who are Christians going through times of change at present –changing school, college or university. Pray that their faith will be strengthened through the changes.
- Pray for the Alpha Course starting soon – those interested, those who come as guests, helpers, leaders, practicalities etc.

Can I trust God...?

2: ...under fire?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

If you were world famous for one thing, what would you like it be?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Find a song about following Jesus. Each take off a shoe and put it in the middle of the room. Listen to/sing the song & commit to following Jesus more closely in the months ahead.

WORD

Assign parts to different people –Narrator, Herald, Astrologers/Advisers, Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach/Meshach/Abednego (1 person or 3)

Now read Daniel 3 with these parts –be as dramatic as you like!

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What do you think the following characters were feeling as they gathered on the plain –the king, local people, S, M & A?
- The king repeats his demand to S, M & A for obedience in v15. S, M & A could have decided to bow to the idol.

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- * How many different possible responses/excuses can you think of that they could have given for doing this? (e.g. 'We'll bow down, but not actually worship' or 'Better that we survive' etc)
- * What would you have done? (Be honest!)
- S, M & A stuck together, encouraged one another and were accountable to one another in following God. In what ways can we do this today? What could you do to get better at this?
- In v16-18, the men respond 'God is able... he will rescue us... but even if he does not...'
 - * What do you think their response shows about their understanding of what God is like?
 - * How might their response help us in the way that we pray or respond to situations in our own lives?
 - * If the men had died in the furnace, how would your view of the story changed? Would it have changed your understanding of God?
- What are the main modern day 'gods' in our society that compete with God? When do you feel most pressured to worship them? What helps to resist the pressure?
- The second half of v28 could have been an epitaph for S, M & A. As it was, they were there to hear it! Can you imagine this ever being your epitaph? Can you imagine a situation where you might be prepared to take a stand for God, whatever the consequences?

WHAT NEXT?

- Pray!including for Christians who are persecuted for their faith. As a church, we support Open Doors. There are suggestions on their website (opendoorsuk.org) or in their prayer letters.
- Please continue to pray for Alpha.
- Share (maybe in 2s-3s) times when you feel your faith is under most pressure. Pray for one another & commit to continuing to pray for one another over the next fortnight.

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3: ...in the Lion's Den?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

OK, it's Lion's Den, not Dragon's Den, but... if you could go on one 'reality' TV show, which would it be and why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

You could find a video or popular (even children's) version of the Daniel story & then use Daniel 6:26b-27 as a prayer afterwards. (Then use it for question 1 in the next section too!)

WORD

Read Daniel 6 –again, you may like to divide up parts

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Try finding a children's book or video of this story. How does it compare to the real story – what is missed out or emphasised? How would you summarise it differently?
- v4-5: Daniel was recognised as a man of honesty and integrity, even by his enemies...



- * Can you think of people (Christian or otherwise) who are like this? What makes them stand out?
- * What makes it easier/harder to live like this in your home or workplace?
- * What steps can we take to live more like this in our workplaces, homes and church?
- Daniel's response to the pressure on him was to *give thanks* to God –as he always had. What do you make of this?
- Daniel continued to pray 3 times a day. What practical ways have members of the group found to help them pray regularly?
- In v16 Darius recognises that Daniel serves God continually. What does it mean to serve God continually?
 - * Are there times in your day/week/year when you serve God less than others? How could you change this?
- Look at the relationship between Darius & Daniel. Can you find any lessons here for how to witness as Christians to those who don't believe?

WHAT NEXT?

- If you committed to pray for one another in the last session for times when your faith is under pressure...
 - * Share how you've got in those difficult situations
 - * Share how easy you found it to pray for one another. If you struggled –don't give up! Have another go at committing to pray for one another.
 - * If you'd like a tool to help encourage and pray for one another regularly in groups of 2-5, then do get in touch –we're currently developing something to try and help with this as a church.
- Pray for our church and other churches in Alsager –that we would stand up for the right things. Pray too for local politicians.