

daniel

thriving at work as an exile



God's calling and your vocation:
an initiative of the navigators

Daniel: Thriving at Work as an Exile

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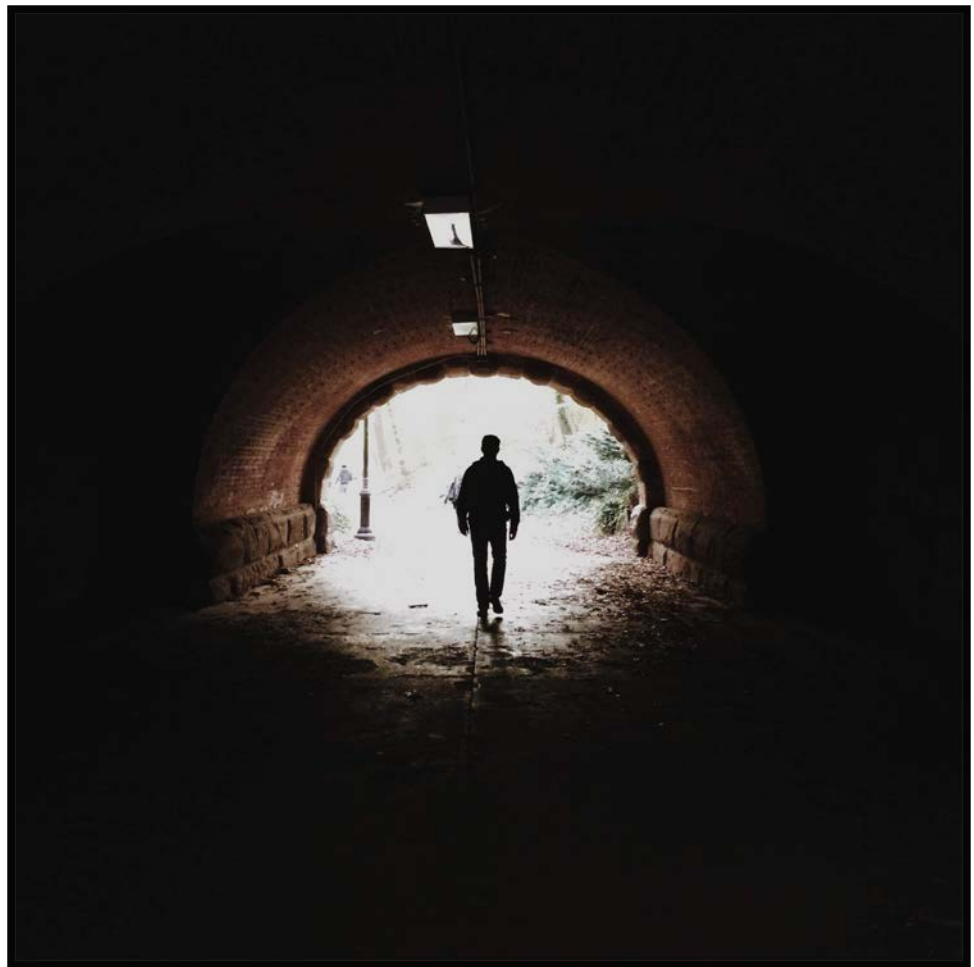


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Getting Started

Convictions and Calling



INTRODUCTION

In this study, you are invited to walk in the steps of Daniel and his friends. Like many of us today, Daniel found himself living and working as an exile in a hostile, foreign culture. As our Western world continues to slip further into a humanistic approach to life (with maybe a spiritual twist to it now and then), followers of Jesus can sometimes feel like exiles within their own culture, especially in the workplace. This is not a study of the book of Daniel or the life of Daniel. It is not an exhaustive study of the topic of work. It is a look at Daniel *in the workplace*.

The goal of this study is to help build and deepen the convictions needed not simply to survive at work, but to fulfill our desire to serve. We want the people around us to experience the goodness of God and to understand the redemptive message of the Gospel. This shift from “survival mode” to serving is part of what it means to grow beyond seeing ourselves simply as “exiles” and learning how to actively live out our calling as “citizens” of God’s Kingdom.

Skills Needed

There are three skills that will make this study richer.

The first is **paying attention to the story**. The Bible contains many different formats: history, poetry, teaching and narrative. The stories in the Bible teach truth by *showing principles in action*. To get the most out of a book like Daniel, you need to pay attention to the action: What is God doing? What are His people doing? And how should their actions shape your own?

Skills Needed

Paying attention to the story

Digging into the details

- Observe
- Interpret
- Apply

Having good conversations

The second skill is **digging into the details**. One time-honored approach is *observe–interpret–apply*.

Observe means to pay attention to what is in a passage. The focus is on the objective facts and the plain meanings of the words.

Interpret means to think about the ideas that these observations stir up and the principles that the facts point to.

Apply means to take these meanings and work to see how they fit into your own life. Application is the step where you decide what you think God is asking you to do, think, believe or feel about what you have just read. Though digging into the details can be rich, it is just as important to think about how those details—and what they mean—apply to your own life. Sometimes, the impact is immediate; and conviction, courage and hope

come flooding in. Other times, you have to do some thinking to see how God might be asking you to respond.

Observe–Interpret–Apply: Example

A common mistake in Bible study is to jump to conclusions about interpretation and application before making enough observations. For example, Daniel 1:8–16 does not say, “Daniel and his friends *refused* to eat the king’s food and were honored for their stance.” Observing more closely, it says that Daniel first “resolved” (v. 8, ESV) and that he then “asked” the person in charge “to allow” Daniel to not “defile himself.” In other words, Daniel first made a strong decision and then respectfully made a request. Applying this richer and more accurate interpretation about strength and respect will be very different from applying the much less accurate view of this passage as a story about defiance.

If you are doing this study with others, the last skill is **having good conversations**. A small group works best when everyone in the group is committed to listening well, asking each other questions, sharing authentically and learning from each other.

A Note About Images

In His teaching and healing, Jesus took steps to help people get ready. Before helping the blind man, for example, He asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Luke 18:41), and before healing the crippled man, He asked, “Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6). Before teaching about God’s provision, he first asked his audience to “look at the birds of the air” (Matthew 6:26).

To help you think about **what you want**, **what you feel** and **what you need**, this study includes optional questions that ask you to consider images. They are not graphic additions to help create a mood, and they are not meant to teach. They are there to help you draw closer to God by helping you be more open about what you are thinking and what you are feeling. Pictures are a very effective way of revealing our hearts, and it is our open, authentic hearts that God is really after.

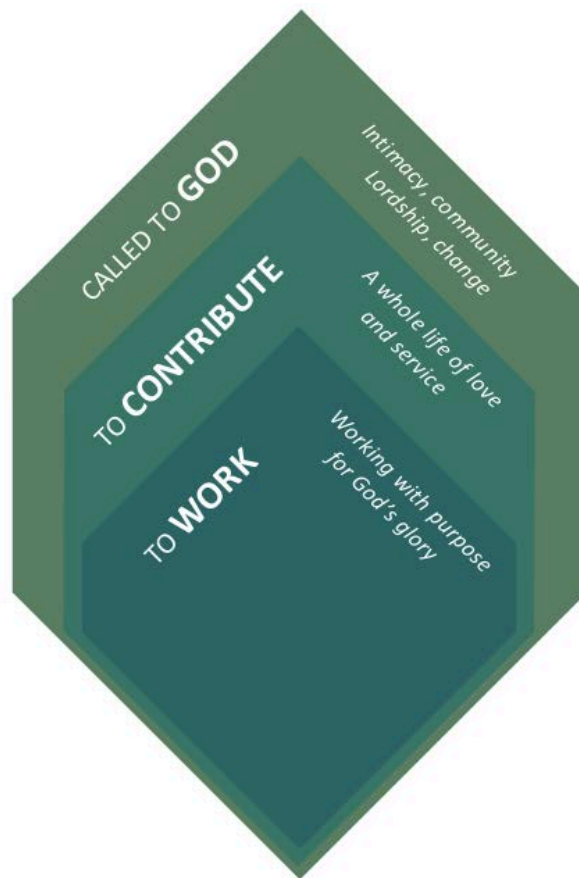
*Trust in him at all times, O people; **pour out your heart before him**; God is a refuge for us. (Psalm 62:8 ESV, emphasis added)*

THE ROLE OF WORK

This study is not designed to cover everything that could be said about work. Instead, it looks at the topic of work and calling through the life of one person. Work is not the central theme of the book of Daniel, but it is its context.

The study will cover a few topics that are likely new to you, but, mostly, it is meant to add depth to ideas (such as prayer, faith and commitment) but this time, with a focus on work and calling. (If you are interested in a more topical study on work, the team that helped put this study together has also written *A Biblical Perspective on Calling, Vocation and Work*.)

One of the hardest questions to sort out is how *work* and *ministry* fit together. How does God's call and guidance into our careers fit into His call to influence the world around us and His even clearer call to intimacy with Himself? Here is one way to picture it:



Called to God: In this picture, everything starts with God and points back to God. The biggest, most important call on our lives is our call to intimacy with God Himself. He wants all of us, all the time.

Called to Contribute: Inside this call to God, God asks us to join in His work of restoring and rebuilding every part of our world. We are called to contribute in every aspect of life through love, serving and doing what is good. This contribution includes work but also other areas: being a good neighbor, volunteering and other types of formal and informal contribution and investment in others.

Called to Work: Within this call to contribute, God leads most people into a career. The Bible teaches that it is not just how we relate to people at work that makes a difference. Very often, it is the work itself that provides a way for us to do good (for example, the farmer who grows food, the doctor who helps people get healthy or the engineer who helps design a safer vehicle). Work is not the “center of the bull’s-eye,” but it can be a very significant place for us to contribute and do our part in changing the world and making it a better place.

As you work through the book of Daniel, look for evidence of Daniel’s priorities and convictions. In what ways do you see Daniel pursuing his work inside of a greater call to love and serve others? In what way do you see Daniel serving others inside the even greater call to walk closely with God?

WRITING A LIFE PURPOSE STATEMENT

Before diving into the study, take some time to examine your own sense of calling—even if it is not very clear yet. Here are a few questions to help get you started. (You will have several chances during the study to revise what you write here.)

1. In terms of the “big picture,” what outcomes most inspire you? For example, do you hope to *inspire*, *create*, *empower* or *help*? List the energizing action verbs that best describe your motivations. (If you are more of a detail person, you might want to start with question 3 and work your way back to question 1.)
2. What group or groups of people do you most want to serve? For example, *the poor*, *those without Christ*, *coworkers*, *customers*, *family*, *those from a specific ethnic group or culture*, etc.

3. What words describe your spiritual gifts, unique talents or special abilities that help you serve others? For example, *giving, designing, building, serving, teaching, interceding*, etc.

4. Looking at your answers to the above, write a first draft of your life purpose statement. This statement should be more than a job title. Here are a few examples:
“To educate and inspire disadvantaged children through teaching.”
“To protect people and our world by designing aircraft that are safer and use fewer resources.”
“To be a good parent and raise my children well.”

When you are done writing, step back and reflect (if you have a friend around to talk with about it, even better) and ask yourself:

- Is your purpose consistent with how God has designed you?
- Is it compelling and significant to you?
- Does it inspire others?

WHEN JESUS RULES IT ALL

Because work and calling are the focus of this study, it covers in detail only those chapters that record events from Daniel’s life and only briefly touches on Daniel’s prophetic writing. One prophetic gem that cannot be overlooked, however, is the coronation of Jesus:

*I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion*

*and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14 ESV)*

In the middle of a chapter filled with apocalyptic imagery, there is one central theme: Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the rightful ruler of all of life. Though his Kingdom has not yet been fully revealed, it has been launched and is indeed on its way.

1. What do you observe in these verses about “the Son of Man’s” dominion?
2. In your experience working and studying, where have you most seen the Kingdom of God at work?
3. What are some of the changes you most look forward to seeing established “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)?

Spend a few minutes praying about your career and the people you work with (or will work with). Pray that God would use this study to deepen your love for Him, your love for others and your understanding and ability to follow His call.

Book Overview

A Kingdom Citizen at Work



HOW TO DO A BOOK OVERVIEW

One of the best ways to enrich a chapter-by-chapter study of any book of the Bible is to begin by getting a sense of the whole. Before you begin your reflection on Daniel, preview the whole book. Pay attention to the “big picture” and major themes. Here are four ways to do an overview of the book before digging into the details. (Select one.)

Read

In one sitting, read the whole book, either in your favorite translation or a modern version. Your goal is to get an overview of the book. When you are finished, jot down any initial impressions. For example, what is the person Daniel like? What challenges does he face? What is God like? Do you have any initial thoughts on what God might be saying to you? After reading on your own, use the discussion questions below in a small group or on your own to help deepen your own reflection.

Watch

The 2013 *The Book of Daniel* movie (1hr 28 min) captures the story extremely well. Though it does not have the cinematography of something like *The Lord of the Rings*, the acting is good, and its faithfulness to the Bible is excellent. [The trailer and reviews are available on Amazon.](#)

There are multiple outlets for purchasing the DVD, including Amazon. The movie is also available (at time of writing) at www.christiancinema.com/digital/movie/4690. After watching, use the discussion questions below in a small group or on your own to help deepen your own reflection.

Listen

Many sites, including [BibleGateway](#), provide audio. Listen to the whole book, and when you are finished, jot down any initial impressions. What is the person Daniel like? What challenges does he face? What is God like? Do you have any initial thoughts on what God might be saying to you? After listening, use the discussion questions below in a small group or on your own to help deepen your own reflection.

Study

For a more inductive approach, here are the traditional steps to doing a book overview:

- Quickly read through the book several times, each time in one sitting. If possible, try to find a translation that has no (or minimal) added headings.
- Create a simple outline of the book, dividing it into major sections and subsections.
- List the book's most important ideas or themes.
- In one or two sentences, write out the main theme of the book.
- Write your own title for the book.
- Select one key verse.

After studying, use the discussion questions below in a small group or on your own to help deepen your own reflection.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What thoughts and feelings surface for you after viewing, hearing, reading or studying Daniel?
2. In what ways do you identify with Daniel's life journey, and in what ways is your life very different from his?
3. Discuss the words *expatriate*, *immigrant*, *exile*, *slave* and *besieged worker*. Which of these words or combination of words best describe Daniel and his friends?

Daniel's home was besieged, captured and then destroyed. He and a small group of survivors were then taken against their will into exile. They were ...

Exiled from their families

Exiled from political power

Exiled from their economic systems

Exiled from their culture

And became outsiders among their peers in captivity

Daniel's experience was sudden and dramatic. He and his friends were clearly exiles. Do you believe you are currently living and working, in some ways, as an exile? Explain.

In the end, Daniel became more than an exile. He lived as a citizen in the Kingdom of God. How do you think he arrived at this understanding of himself, and what do you think helped him live out this calling?

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time alone to pray. Listen to God and tell Him your heart. If you are in a group, finish by praying together.

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Daniel's story crossed many decades and several different contexts. In time, your life and career journey will also likely cover many decades. Though impossible to know with certainty, how do you imagine your timeline will look? What major events, accomplishments and locations do you imagine ahead? Make a short list (or write out a timeline) of the major time periods in your life and make predictions about what could be coming next.

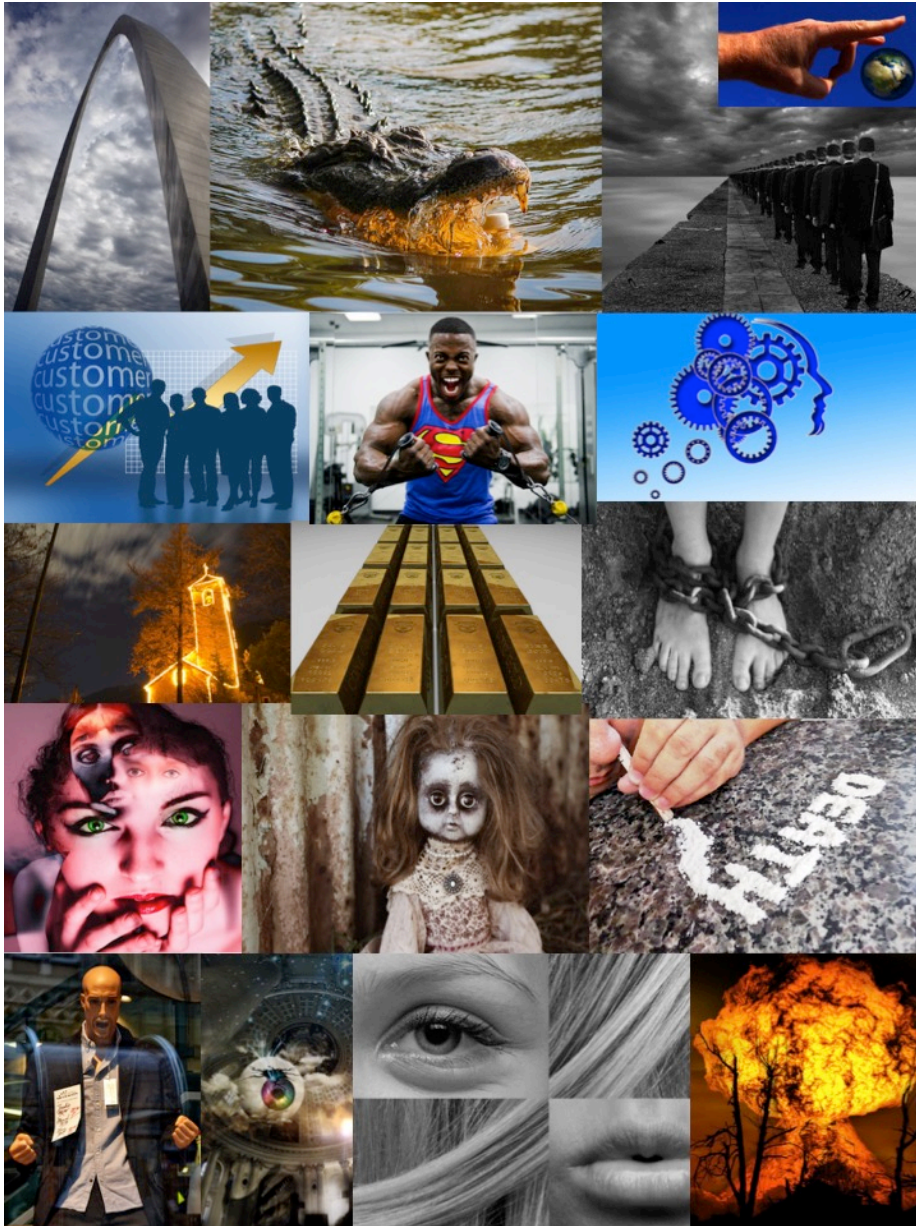
Daniel One

When Vision and Values Clash



WARMUP

After the fall of Jerusalem and the desecration of the Temple, Daniel and others were exiled to Babylon – the city of their enemy and symbol of everything that stands against God. One of their first concerns was how to remain committed to God and undefiled. As a warmup, select one or two of the images below (or find other images) that depict some aspect of choices that defile the soul.



- What thoughts or feelings about being defiled do these images stir up?
- In these depictions of being defiled, where might God be at work?
- Is there anything God is inviting you to? Dangers you need to avoid?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

Read **chapter one** (one or more times). Try multiple Bible versions. Pay particular attention to the “clash of cultures” in the chapter and Daniel’s response to this conflict.

Discuss: Daniel’s World

1. How does Daniel’s response to the threat of being defiled compare to the themes you observed in the images above?
2. How do you imagine Daniel and his friends responding to their Babylonian oppressors changing the names given to them by their parents? (1:7)
3. Why do you think these four exiled students took such a bold stand for a vegetarian diet?
4. God gave them “learning and skill...and understanding” (1:17 ESV). How might Daniel’s credentials translate into today’s workforce? How might being *defiled* have impacted Daniel’s knowledge and understanding?

Discuss: My World

5. Do you identify with Daniel in any way? In what ways has your experience and your own cultural context been similar to Daniel’s?

6. Do any of the cultural norms that you must live with have the potential to “defile” (v. 8) your conscience or Christian traditions? Are there any customs that are not defiling but are just unconformable because they are unfamiliar?

7. Living and working in the world as a citizen of God’s Kingdom can feel a lot like being in exile. Who are the friends who have been journeying with you (or you hope to journey with) into exile? What makes them uniquely fitted for this journey? How will you need to support each other?

8. What type of friend are you to others? What can your friends depend on from you on their journey? How have you been growing in this area?

Convictions

9. Daniel and his friends had strong convictions. They understood for whom, what and why they were living and what they were willing to die for in exile. As you reflect on this study and your own sense of calling, are there any convictions you see in Daniel that you also have or are in the process of forming?

10. Are there ways your school or work context is pushing back against these convictions and how you feel about these tensions.

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time alone to pray. Listen to God and tell Him your heart. Ask for courage to make good choices as an exile and to deepen your convictions. Then pray together as a group.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. (Daniel 1:8 ESV)

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

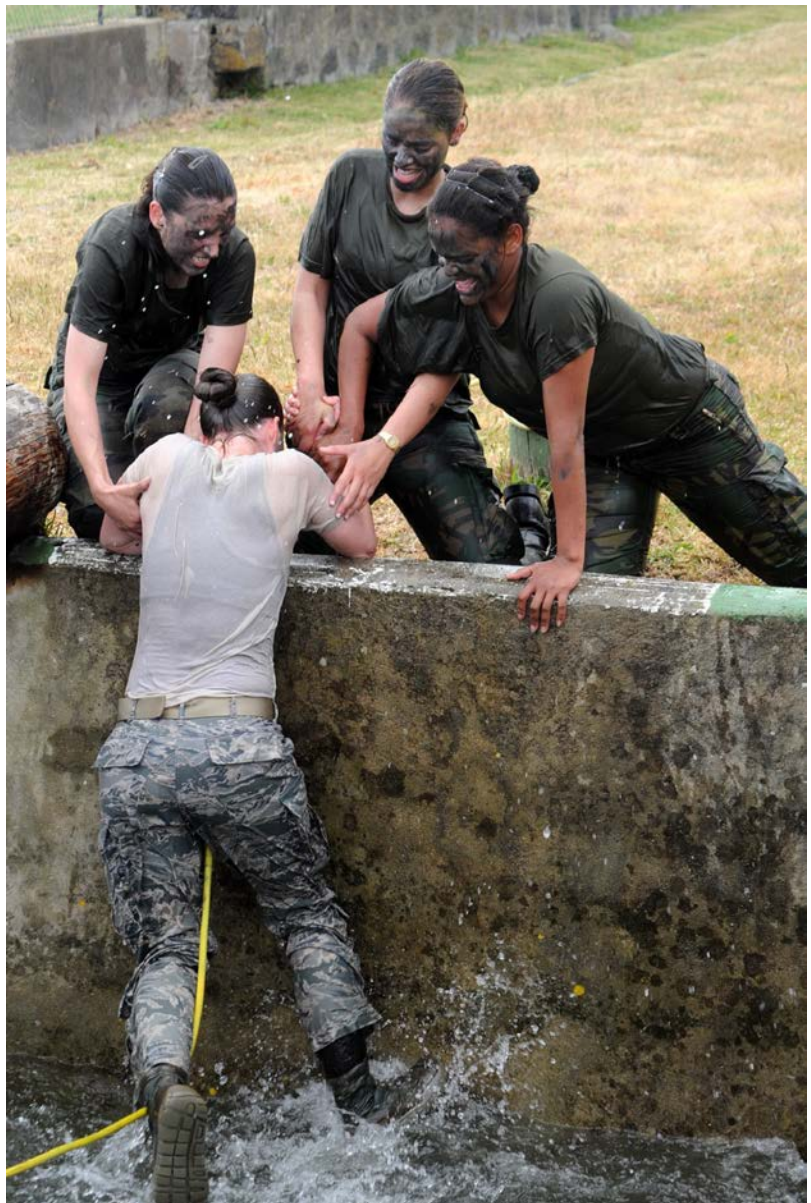
Images are everywhere. At the beginning of this chapter, you were asked to select images that depict some aspect of choices that defile the soul. The goal, as mentioned in the introduction, was to help reveal your thoughts and feelings.

Images can also reveal what others are thinking and the values the world wants to project. While many of the images we see each day are positive, not all are. In your work or study places, what are some of these images that might defile your soul? And what are some images that encourage, uplift and bring meaning?

If you can bring images into your workplace, consider taking one or two that encourage, uplift and bring meaning to your soul. Others may comment on images. You may want to be prepared to tell the story of your image to others. What about it is important to you? How does it impact you?

Daniel Two

CONVICTIONS AND COURAGE



EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

Read chapter two regarding Nebuchadnezzar's first dream and Daniel's response. If possible, scan it two or more times. Try multiple Bible versions if you'd like. (See [BibleGateway](#) for online versions.) Obviously, being asked to interpret a dream is not an ordinary work request. Even so, as you read the chapter, pay attention to the work issues involved: the challenge to perform, relating to coworkers, the potential for failure and unexpected rewards.

Discuss: Daniel's World

1. "Perform or die" (Daniel 2:6). That was the demand Nebuchadnezzar made of all his advisors, Daniel included. How did Daniel exhibit courage in the face of this unreasonable demand from the king? Where do you think this courage came from? How did Daniel keep this perspective in the face of this incredibly tense situation?
2. At the end of the chapter, the king promotes Daniel and, at Daniel's request, promotes his friends. Why do you think the king promoted a foreigner to such heights within the kingdom and granted him so much influence?
3. In addition to power and authority, Daniel's promotion included significant wealth. (See verses 46–49.) From what you have seen so far of his character, how do you think Daniel responded to acquiring riches and becoming a ruler?
4. How do you imagine the rest of the exiles from Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) responded to the news that Daniel had been made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the

wise men of Babylon” (v. 48)? Do you think they were excited, happy, hopeful, envious or judgmental? In what ways might his people feel they were being betrayed?

Discuss: My World

5. Have you ever had an unreasonable request from a boss, teacher or someone in authority? How did you respond? How was courage (i.e., “kingdom fortitude”) or fear involved in your response? Following the example of Daniel, how do you hope you might respond the next time you are faced with such a request or demand?
6. Do you expect God to show up in the hard places of your life and work and in the lives of those who don’t worship the Most High God? Explain.
7. Many people stand up for God and are not promoted. How might Daniel’s experience create false expectations of God’s response?
8. What expectations do you have about advancing in your career? How do you hope to respond if you are promoted? What might you do if you are demoted or if things do not advance very quickly? How might such setbacks affect your view of God and your relationship with Him?

Convictions

9. A conviction is a well thought through conclusion that you are willing to embrace, act on and, if need be, suffer for. Daniel and his friends had such convictions. List one or two of your convictions that you have embraced, acted on and are willing to suffer for regarding your vocation. (For example, “Don’t panic. Pray!”)
10. What might shake or disrupt these convictions? What might fortify them?

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time alone to pray. Listen to God and tell Him your heart. Consider asking Him for godly convictions and courage as you live as an exile. Are you aware of anything He is inviting you to? After, pray together as a group.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE

Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these.” (Daniel 2:27–28 ESV)

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Image Selection

Find one or two images that represent your views of true courage. See the collage at the end of this section or find an image on www.vibrantfaith.org¹ or some other website.

Describe your image or images and why you were drawn to them. As you reflect on what you selected, what emotions surface within you? How do this image and your response to it connect with having courage in the workplace?

Other Faiths/Non–Faith

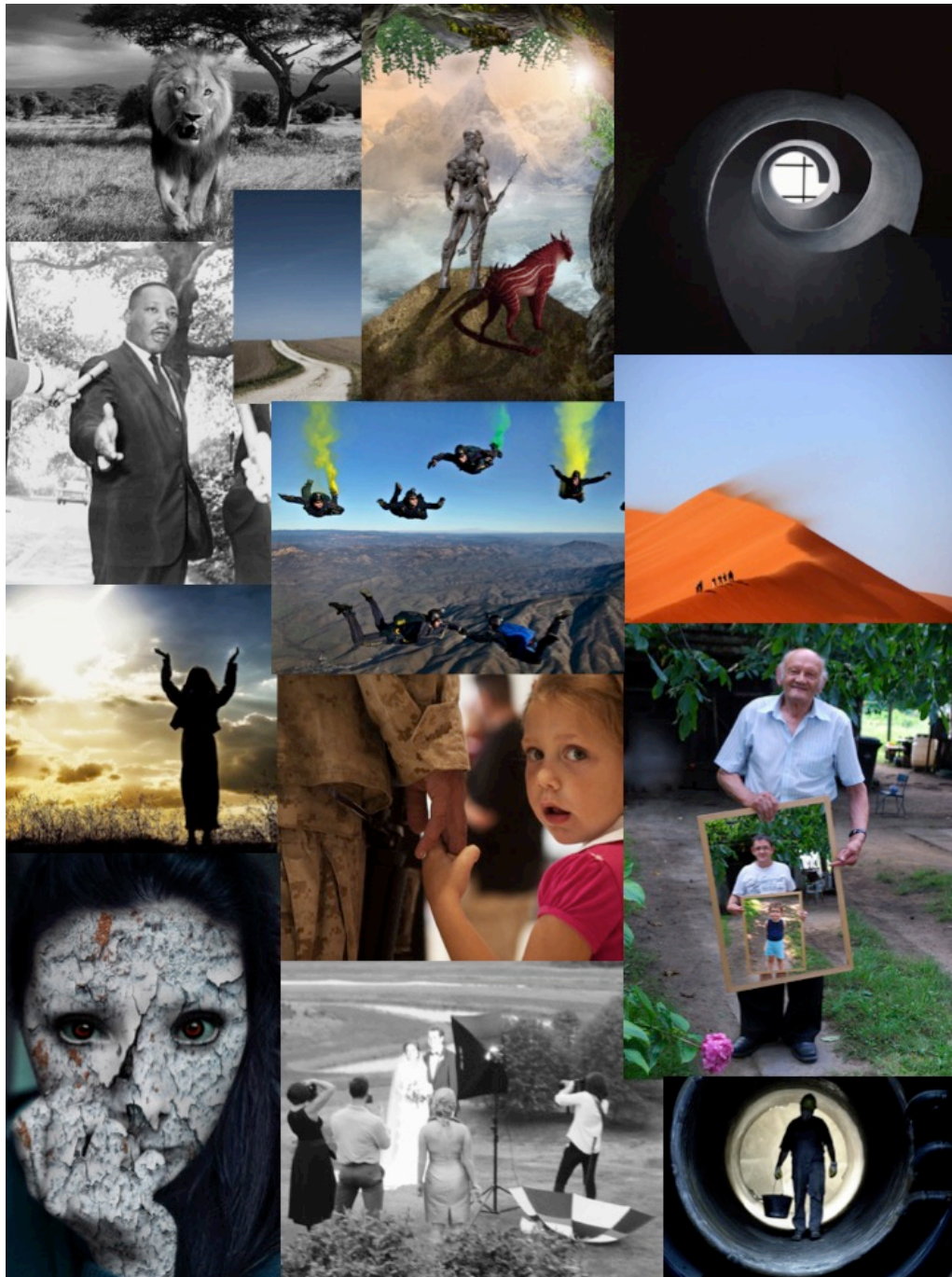
One challenge to our convictions can come from people of other faiths. On your campus or in your workplace, how do you relate to people of other faiths or people who claim no faith? What difficulties do you find in relating to people who come from such different perspectives?

If you sense that some people no longer care very much about faith, sin and guilt, this article, “The Issue of Shame in Reaching People for Christ: When Guilt–Free Isn’t Enough,” explains why some people feel this way and what you might do about it. (Available as a free download at: www.ralphennis.com/spiritual-formation.html.)

If you are looking for more of a philosophical explanation of why so many different perspectives are possible, read the article *A Space Beyond: Perspective on Various Spiritualities* (available at the same website).

¹ This website provides 2000+ high–quality images through a curated, searchable database. Vibrant Faith is a Christian organization committed to taking “the best research and academic insight, ground and deepen it with Christian theology and instill an evangelical spirit of ministry to help congregations strengthen families to nurture faith.” Subscription required.

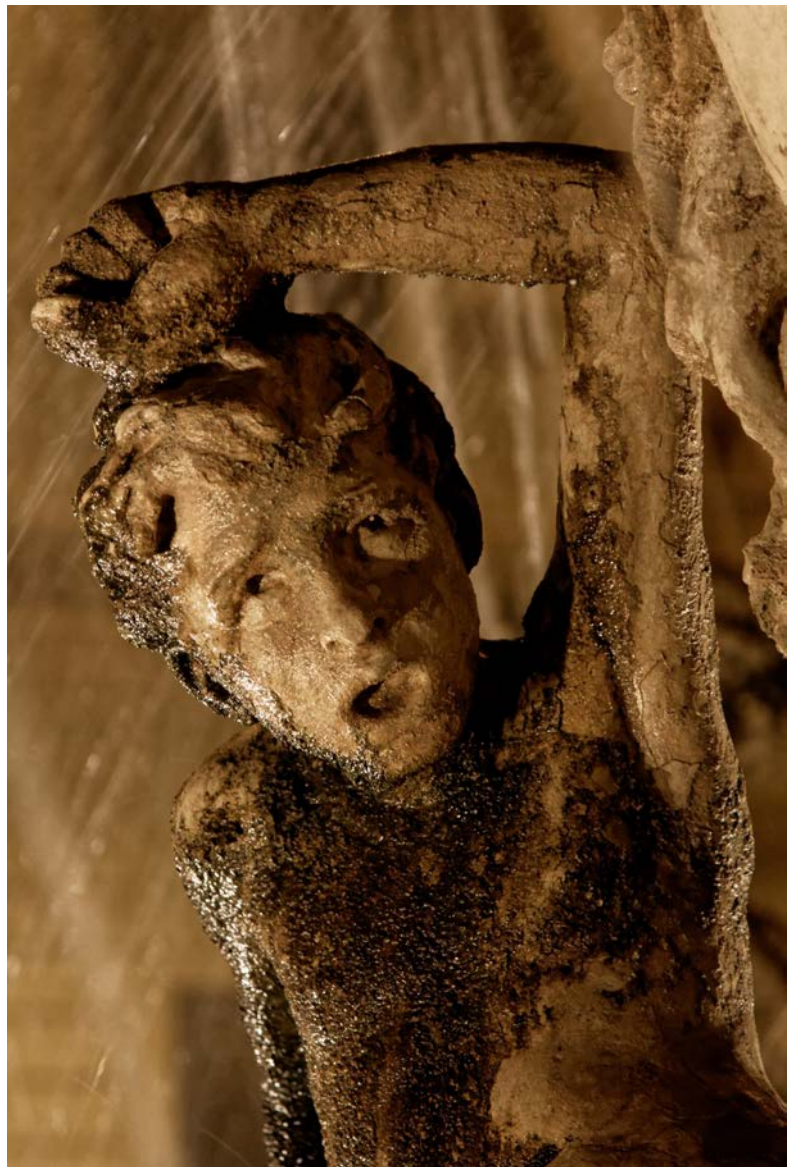
Find one or two images that represent your views of true courage.



- Describe your selected image or images and why you were drawn to them.
- As you reflect on what you selected, what emotions surface within you?
- How does this image and your response connect with having courage in the workplace?

Daniel Three

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING



WARMUP

Suffering comes in many different forms. Before you begin, select one or two images that you think best represent suffering. See the collage below or find an image at <http://www.vibrantfaith.org/visualfaith>.



- Describe your image or images and why you were drawn to them.
- As you reflect on what you selected, what emotions surface within you?
- How does this image connect with your life story and your own experience with suffering?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

Read **chapter three** regarding the golden image and the fiery furnace and make observations. Look for ways in which Daniel's friends approached the possibility of extreme suffering. Read multiple versions to expand your familiarity with the story.

Discuss: Daniel's World

1. What was the motive behind the accusation (vv. 8–12)? Was the king's anger based on the same motivation or something different (13–15)?
2. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (*Shad–rak, Mee–shak* and *Uh–behd–nih–goh*) exhibited great courage in the face of extreme suffering. What made them able to choose such courage? Where do you think they found the strength?
3. They acknowledged the uncertainty of deliverance. Why do you think they were not complaining to God about their situation?
4. What impact do you think their faith had on the king? On their accusers?
5. Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter. As you reflect on his absence, what stands out to you? Why might it be important for his three friends to undergo such a trial without him? Why might it have been important for Daniel to be absent?

Discuss: My World

6. As you think about your career, where have you been or where might you be challenged to compromise? What costs were involved or might be involved in you making kingdom-oriented career decisions?
7. As you think about future possibilities for suffering for doing what is right in your career, how do you feel? If you do face such a choice, how do you hope to respond?
8. When you experience suffering for doing something wrong, how do you respond toward others, God and yourself?
9. How might the experience and example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego help you deal with the sufferings in your life and in the lives of others? What lessons do you learn from their example?
10. Reflect on the following:

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake. (Philippians 1:29, ESV)

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. (Philippians 3:10, ESV)

What do you think “share his sufferings” means? How do you experience the presence of God in the midst of suffering?

11. How do you respond to the sufferings of others in the workplace?

Convictions

12. Convictions often take time to form. Daniel's friends exhibited strong convictions regarding the nature of God and His trustworthiness, even in the face of suffering. List one or two of your convictions concerning God that you have embraced, acted on and are willing to suffer for. How might these convictions impact your choices within your vocation? What might shake these convictions? What might fortify them?

13. After you have reflected, do you notice any places where you have ongoing resistance toward or disappointment with God?

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time to pray alone. Listen to God and tell Him your heart. Notice your openness or lack of openness to God and what He might be saying. Talk to Him about it. After, pray together as a group.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE

*"If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
(Daniel 3:17–18 ESV)*

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Reflecting on the Past

Spend some time reflecting or journaling about your experiences with suffering and any questions you have about what happened and why. How might unresolved suffering impact the quality and meaning of your work?

Read, Reflect

Dear God: We Need to Talk about Suffering. This resource is a series of journal entries written along the pathway of processing pain and suffering. You can download it at www.ralphennis.com/spiritual-formation.html. Another excellent resource is Or read C.S. Lewis' classic book on the topic, *The Problem of Pain*.

Daniel Four

Building Societies



WARMUP

As Daniel and the exiles left their land for Babylon, Jeremiah prophesied. Daniel undoubtedly kept these words in mind throughout his life.

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:7 ESV)

Before you read the chapter, spend a few minutes thinking, talking to a friend or journaling about the connection between seeking “the welfare of the city” and sharing the Good News with people.

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

Read chapter four regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream and Daniel’s interpretation. Pay attention to how Daniel’s heart responds.

Discuss: Daniel’s World

1. Jeremiah commanded the exiles to seek the peace and prosperity of the city and to pray to the Lord for it. Daniel did just that. In all he did, he added *ethical goodness* to Babylon—he made it a better place. He served with excellence and integrity—while worshipping and relying on the Lord God. As a result, Daniel not only modeled a good life, he also helped make life better. What about this call to “seek the welfare” of the world around us is surprising? Encouraging? Puzzling?
2. Look again at Daniel’s response to Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream. This dream indicated that the king would be cut off from his kingdom for seven years. Here is part of Daniel’s response:

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king answered and said, “Belteshazzar, let not the dream or the interpretation alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream be for

those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!” (Daniel 4:19 ESV)

“Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.” (Daniel 4:27 ESV)

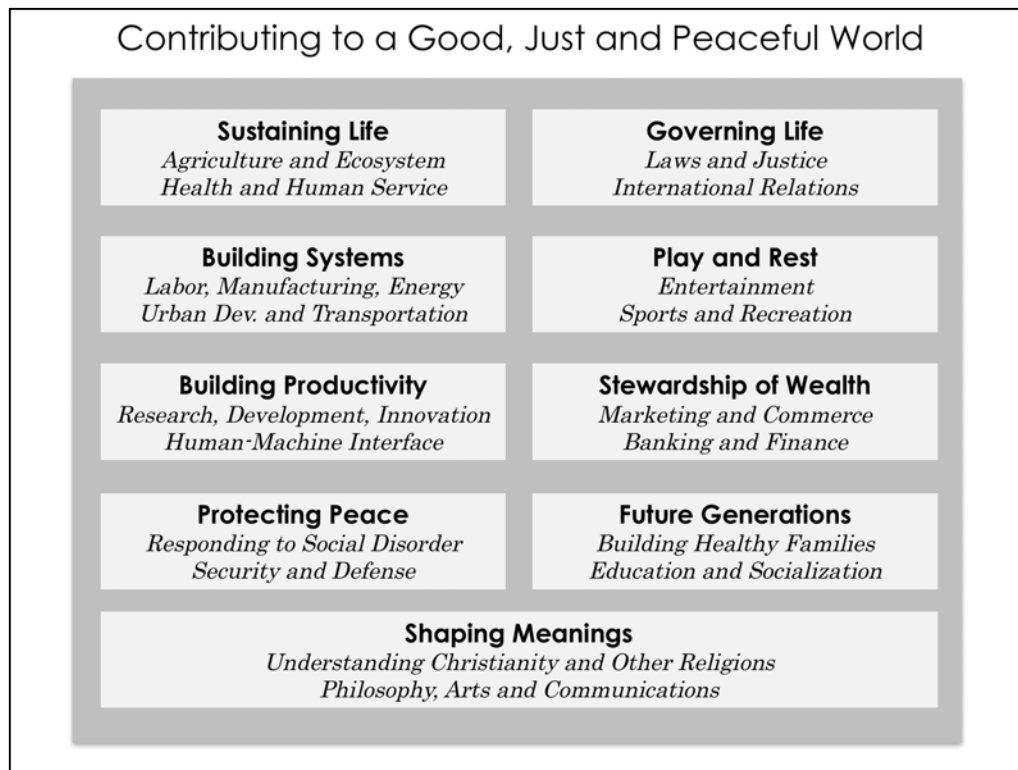
Do you think Daniel was being sincere in his concern for this foreign king? Why or why not?

3. Would you want a foreign king who had enslaved your people to prosper? Explain.

Discuss: My World

4. Throughout the book of Daniel, he and his friends are praised for their “learning” and “excellence.” How do you view the role of learning and excellence while working for a company not directly committed to Biblical values? What might be the consequences of not being a lifelong learner at work or of doing less than excellent work? Think about the outcomes not only for yourself but also for your company and for the people your company serves.
5. Daniel lived in the world of government administration. Most of us do not. However, as you consider the current political realities of the culture you live in, how would you imagine politicians and government workers fulfilling Jeremiah’s directive (Jeremiah 29:7)? How might you help bring the *ethical goodness* of the Kingdom of God (i.e., the practical, everyday goodness of God’s ways) and the *redemptive message* of Jesus into today’s political culture?

6. Thinking about your own career, in what practical ways might you bring the ethical goodness of God and the redemptive message of Jesus into the world that you live in? What might that look like over a 10 to 20 year period of time? (Use your imagination!)
7. The graphic below describes many of the positive contributions required to keep a modern society functioning healthily. As you think about your own interests, skills and experiences, which of these areas do you think you are the best suited to contribute to?



Is there a function that you are primarily drawn to? Are there one or two other functions that are secondary to you? What about the areas you are not interested in? How do you hope they are fulfilled?

8. How might God use you in bringing His Kingdom power—His goodness and redemptive message—into your workplace and our world?

Convictions

Convictions are closely tied to commitments. Convictions are strongly held beliefs. They are things we are absolutely *convinced* about. Commitments are often our response to these convictions. For example, if I am convinced I need to eat well, I might make a commitment to eat three balanced meals a day. Other times, we make commitments along the way to developing deeper convictions. While I may not be absolutely convinced eating well is important, I may still make a commitment to eating three good meals a day as a way to grow in a conviction that I am pretty sure is right.

Daniel and his friends, for example, exhibited strong convictions and commitments regarding seeking the “peace and prosperity” (Jeremiah 29:7 NIV) of the city that enslaved them. They were both convinced that God was at work and acted accordingly.

9. List one or two of your convictions or commitments regarding seeking peace and prosperity that you have embraced, acted on or are willing to suffer for in the context of your vocation.
10. What might shake or disrupt these convictions and commitments?
What might fortify them?
11. One barrier to peace and prosperity is injustice. Are there areas of inequality that God has been bringing to your attention? Are there

convictions or commitments you sense that He may be calling you into?

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time alone to pray. Listen to God and tell Him your heart. Ask Him to give you godly convictions as you live as an exile. After, pray together as a group.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. (Jeremiah 29:7 NIV)

IMAGE SELECTION (OPTIONAL)

Find one or two images that represent goodness to you. See the collage at the end of this section or find an image on

<http://www.vibrantfaith.org/visualfaith> or some other website.

Describe your image and why you were drawn to it. How might this image connect with your future over the next 5–10 years? Or does it?

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Watch the movie *Amazing Grace* (1hr 58 min). It depicts the journey of Wilber Wilberforce as he sought to eliminate the slave trade and ultimately slavery in the British Empire. (See www.amazinggracemovie.com.) After watching, what impacts your heart from the movie? How might this influence your workplace choices?

Find one or two images that represent goodness to you.



- Describe your image and why you were drawn to it.
- How might this image connect with your future over the next 5–10 years?

Daniel Five

Sidelined and Recalled



EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

At the beginning of chapter five, Daniel is nowhere to be found. After Nebuchadnezzar, other rulers came to power, and somewhere along the way, Daniel lost his standing as a key counselor and administrator. Read **chapter five** regarding the fall of Babylon and Daniel's summons. Take note of any evidence that points to Daniel's humility and boldness—after being ignored and then recalled—in the face of imminent “regimen change.”

Discuss: Daniel's World

1. From what you have learned about Daniel's character so far, how do you think he dealt with being demoted and sidelined during King Belshazzar's reign? What do you think got him through those times?
2. When Daniel was recalled to serve the king, how did he display humility and boldness vs. pride and timidity?
3. In a pluralistic society where many religious ideas were tolerated, the king and queen both acknowledged “the spirit of the gods is in you” (v.14). What was Daniel's response to such high praise? In what ways do coworkers, friends or family who genuinely believe that “all paths are the same in the end” deliver this kind of praise today?
4. What do you think was harder for Daniel, the tension of actively living out his faith in a high-pressure workplace or the challenge of being sidelined? Which would be harder for you?

Discuss: My World

5. Have you ever been sidelined in your schooling or vocation? If so, describe that scenario and how it impacted you.

6. We all like to contribute in our vocation, but sometimes, we get sidelined by events beyond our control. How do you believe your sense of accomplishment and contribution impacts your self-worth and identity?

7. As you look ahead, how do you hope you might react to being sidelined?

8. Have you ever been sidelined and then recalled by the same boss or institution? How did you respond? How did you experience God at work in and through those events?

9. Fundamentally, our calling is to God. He calls us into relationship with Himself. Within this call, God also leads us into opportunities to contribute to others and into careers, but, sometimes, our sense of vocational calling and contribution can become an idol. (An idol is anything that comes before our love relationship with God.) As you reflect on your life today, have you ever been tempted to make your contributions or positions an idol? If so, how does God want you to deal with this temptation?

IMAGE SELECTION

Find one or two images that represent your view of being sidelined or demoted. (See <http://www.vibrantfaith.org/visualfaith> or some other website.)

Describe your image(s) and why you were drawn to it. As you reflect on your selected image, what emotions surface within you? Do you sense God is extending an invitation to you? Explain.

CONVICTIONS

A conviction is often tested by adverse circumstances. Daniel's trust in the Most High God survived the trial of becoming obsolete to the reigning king. List one or two of your convictions that you have which would be challenged if you were "put on a shelf" and left unused in your vocation. How might this kind of challenge actually benefit you in the long run?

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time alone to pray. Listen to God. Do you find yourself wrestling, disquieted, frustrated or peaceful? Expectant or hopeful? Talk to Him about it. When it seems right, ask Him for godly convictions and courage as you live as an exile. Then pray together as a group.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation." (Daniel 5:17 ESV)

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Interview one or more older people about their career journey. Did they experience a time of being sidelined and/or being recalled? What did they learn from that experience? Even when people have experience and spiritual maturity, it can be intimidating to be asked to serve as a mentor or to teach on a topic. Explaining your expectations can help. Asking, “Can we get a cup of coffee sometime to talk about (work/raising kids/etc.)?” will often go better than asking, “Could you mentor/teach/disciple me in how to...?”

Daniel Twelve

God's Bigger Story: and Our Part as Fellow Citizens



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This session looks at chapter twelve, the last chapter in the book of Daniel, and the whole study ends in the next session, with a look at chapter six. Why?

First, Hebrew Scriptures are not always organized chronologically. Daniel is divided, for example into chapters 1–6, which focus on Daniel's personal experiences, and chapter 7–12, which covers a series of visions that God gave Daniel over his lifetime. So, before diving into chapter six, which records events near the end of Daniel's life, we move next to chapter twelve, which in many ways, is the “capstone” of the prophecy recorded in chapters 7–12.

Second, reading the book of Daniel centuries later, it can be easy to miss the fact that the events in chapters 1–6 occurred over many decades. (Scholars estimate Daniel lived close to 70 years in Babylon.) In other words, there were often years between the events recorded. Looking at chapter twelve before we finish looking at Daniel's life gives us a glimpse into what God was doing with Daniel during these gaps, including times, as we saw in chapter five, when Daniel was not in the spotlight.

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

Read **chapter twelve** regarding the end of times. Look carefully at Daniel's response to these prophecies. What are Daniel's concerns? What do you observe about his character?

Discuss: Daniel's World

1. What do you notice about Daniel's response in verse 8? What does his statement (“I did not understand”) and his question (“what shall be the outcome of these things?”) show about his character and his motivations? Who or what does he seem to be concerned about?

2. In the previous chapter Daniel was told:

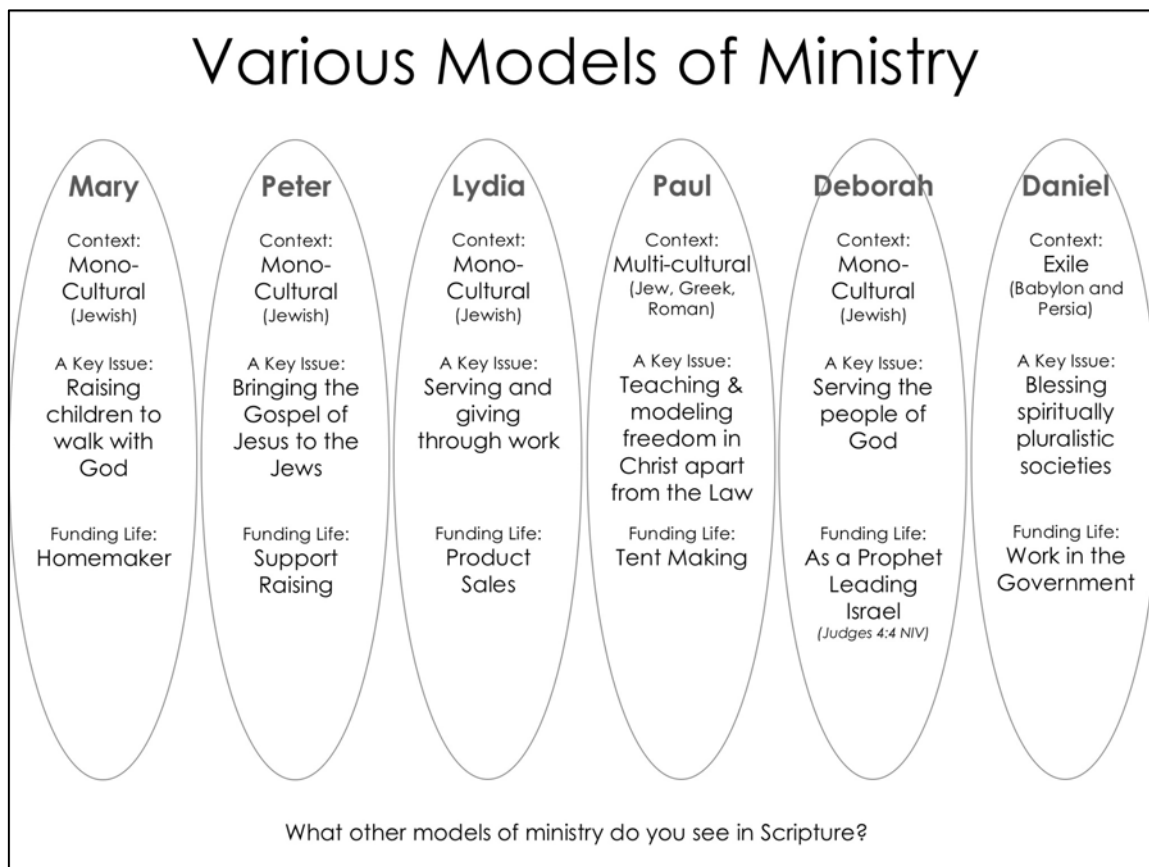
He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.
(Daniel 11:32 ESV)

What does “stand firm and take action” mean to you?

3. How did Daniel and his friends “stand firm and take action” in their day?
4. What does verse 3 say about what a life of faith in the midst of an unbelieving world look like?
5. Here, near the end of his life, do you think Daniel primarily considered himself an *exile in the Babylonian empire*, a *Jewish expatriate*, a *fellow citizen in the Kingdom of God*? What is the difference between these views? Explain.
6. How do you think Daniel’s image of himself impacted his actions throughout his years in captivity, especially his years when he operated largely in obscurity?

Discuss: My World

7. Do you believe in a particular “end time” scenario? What are your current convictions? Where do they come from? Are there any approaches you think are misguided?
8. Consider Daniel 11:32b (ESV): “but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.” What are some of the different ways you see people trying to “stand firm and take action” in the times we live in today?
9. The graphic below depicts some of the ministry models that can be found in Scripture.



Which model best describes how you sense God is calling you to minister as a fellow citizen in His kingdom?

10. As you think about the kinds of people you might be around during your career, how do you see yourself seeking to stand firm and take action?
11. Write down the names of one or two people you know who exemplify the model you believe God may be calling you into. If possible, set aside a time to interview that person to learn more about his or her vocational journey. (See “Going Deeper” section below for a few ideas on how.)

Convictions

A conviction is more than a passing opinion or intellectual belief—it is a choice, an act of the will. Throughout his life, Daniel exhibited strong convictions that all of human history is authored by God.

- List one or two of your convictions regarding the end times that you have embraced, acted on and are willing to suffer for. (Focus on principles and the character of God, not details of the timing of events. For example, not “I think the world will end before 1984” or “I believe there will be a rapture,” but “I am sure God will be merciful.”)
- How are these convictions influencing the way you approach your vocation? What might shake or disrupt these convictions? What might fortify them?

Generational Ministry

Jesus told his apostles to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Paul instructed Timothy to pass on what he had learned to those “who will

be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Thus, one generation teaches the next. This spiritual generations approach can be embedded in all the various models of ministry. How do you see generational ministry playing out in your vocational life and walk with God in the model you sense God is calling you to?

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time, first, to pray alone. Do you have questions or concerns about what God is calling you to and how your career and impacting others for Christ all fit together? Talk to Him about it and then, if you are in a group, pray together.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE

He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.
(Daniel 11:32 ESV)

IMAGE SELECTION (OPTIONAL)

Find one or two images that represent the end of time. See the collage at the end of this section or find an image on <http://www.vibrantfaith.org/visualfaith> or some other website. Describe your image(s) and why you were drawn to it. As you reflect on your selected image, what emotions surface within you? Do you sense God is extending an invitation to you? Explain.

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

1) Interview

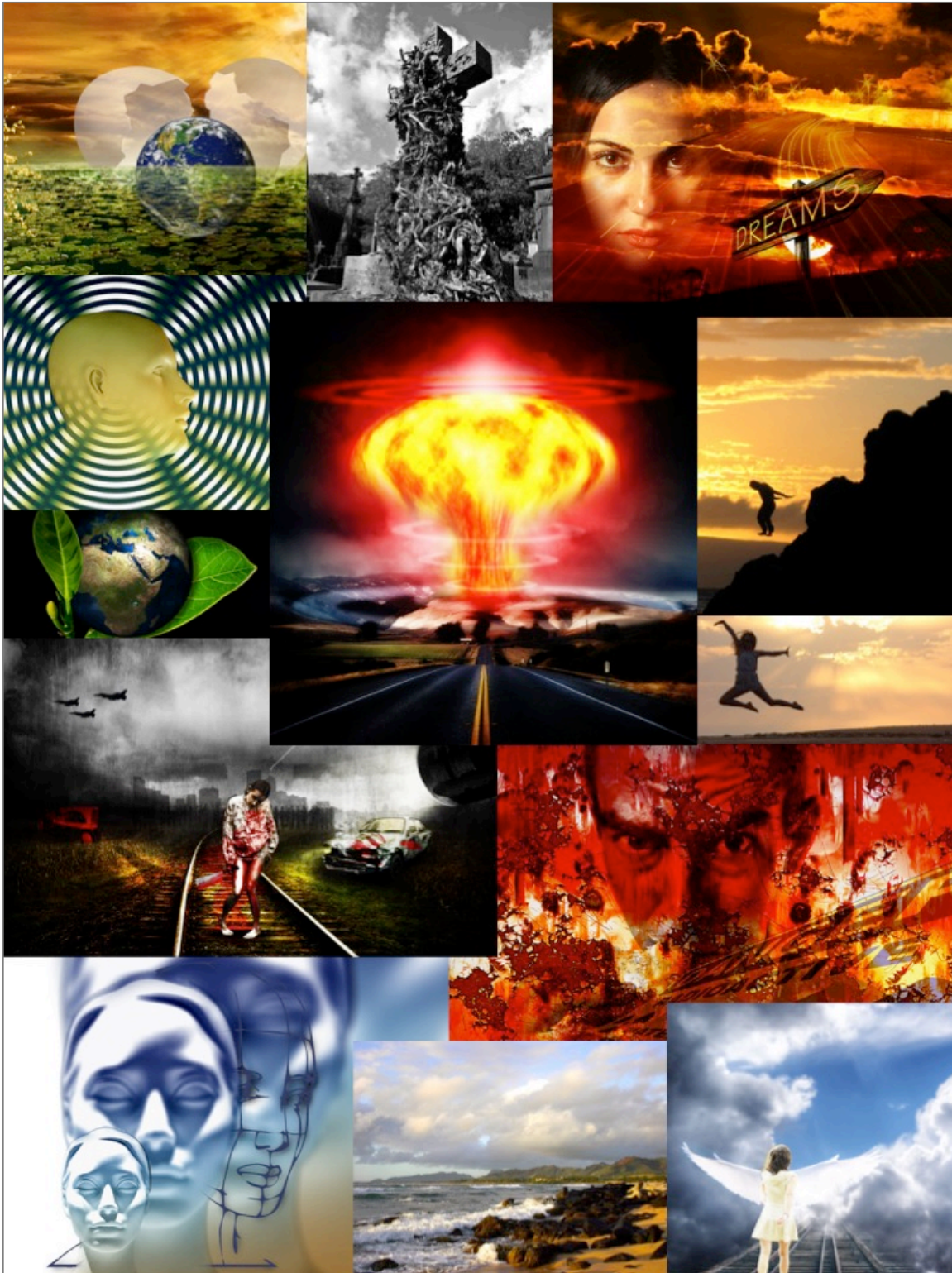
Interview one or two people you know who exemplify the model you believe God may be calling you into. As explained on p. 49, keep your request simple, something like, “Can you tell me how you choose your work and what it’s been like?”

2) Read

Read one or more of the short essays (generally 2–3 pages) available in Book NINE or Book TEN of the *Wharf and Bearing* series, available at www.ralphennis.com/wharf-and-bearings-series.html.

Why did you pick what you read? What stands out to you and why? How might these thoughts impact your vocational choices?

Choose one or two images that represent the end of time.



- Describe your image(s) and why you were drawn to it.
- As you reflect on your selected image, what emotions surface within you?
- Do you sense God is extending an invitation to you? Explain.

Daniel Six and Summary

Dangerous Convictions: When Worship and Work Collide



EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

Read chapter six regarding Daniel's encounter with the lions. Consider Daniel's responses to God and to King Darius. What convictions do you see Daniel living out?

Discuss: Daniel's World

1. What did you observe about Daniel, his convictions and how he responded to the king and to his accusers?
2. As Daniel's work context changed from the Babylonian to the Persian kingdom, his convictions stayed the same. What convictions do you see in Daniel that transcend his workplace context from one "boss" to the next?
3. Daniel was committed to praying to God. Why do you think he chose to commit to three times of daily prayer? (See vv. 10–11.) How do you think his convictions and commitment were linked?
4. What do you think were the motives behind the accusation against Daniel (v. 13)?
5. Daniel's personal story was a small part of God's greater story. Why do you think Daniel, as a non-Persian, rose to such a high position within the Persian empire? What do you think God had in mind for Daniel's ascent?

SUMMARY: THRIVING AS AN EXILE

My Dangerous Convictions

Throughout this study, you have considered your convictions in light of Daniel and his friends. Our convictions can be dangerous to the status quo of the workplace culture and, at times, living out our convictions can become dangerous to our own security and safety at work.

As we form convictions, it is important to go beyond opinions, preferences and even beliefs. Consider the following:

Bias – A bias (or biased opinion) is something you are inclined to think is true even though you have not studied it thoroughly. Quickly share with the group an example of one of your biases or opinions related to a sports team, movie, work, other cultures, etc.

Personal Preference – A personal preference is something you have examined a little and prefer compared to other options. Quickly share with the group an example of one of your preferences related to food, types of books to read, travel locations, friendship circles, etc.

Stated Belief – A stated belief is something you have studied and feel strongly about and usually act on. Share with the group one example of one of your beliefs related to life, spirituality, economic principles, race relations, etc.

Deep Conviction – A deeply held conviction is...

- More than an agreeable statement—it is an active choice, an act of the will.
- Well thought through—considers the pros, the cons and the whys.
- Worthy of committed action, to the point of suffering, if necessary.
- Held tightly even as our contexts change at work or in life.
- A trustworthy commitment based on the only Trustworthy Person—the Triune God Most High.

1. Write down the 2–4 convictions God has been building in you through this study of Daniel. These convictions may not be as strong today as you hope they will be in the future, but they are things you sense God is inviting you to believe more deeply.

2. How dangerous do you think your convictions and commitments are to your career advancement in your current context or your expected future workplace?
3. Can you see ways your commitments might need to change even as your convictions remain the same as your workplace context varies over time?
4. As followers of Jesus, we need each other. We need friends with similar convictions as we journey through life and the workplace. As you make changes over time (types of work, marriage and family, location, etc.), how might your current group of friends support each other? What will it take to find new friends?

Longing

5. We all have God-given longings. Perhaps this study has stirred up some new ones for you. Think about the example of Daniel's life. Which of the longings below relate to your own vocational desires? (Add to this list as necessary.) When you have finished identifying any that relate your desires, jump to the next question below.

To Belong

Intimacy

Romance

Status (Glory)

Protection

Provide

Acquisition

Power

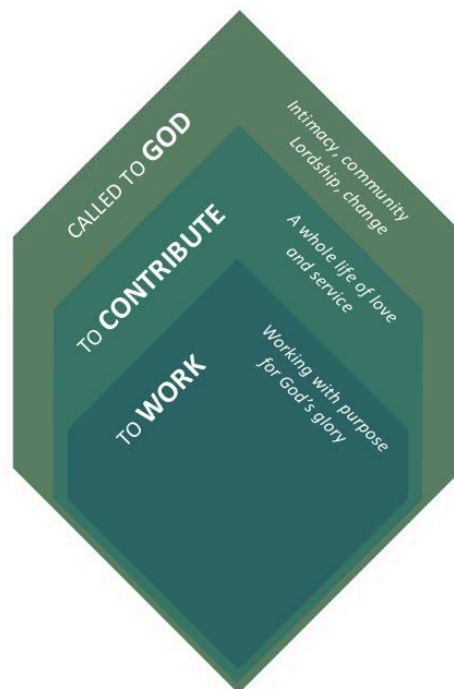
To Build

<i>Order</i>	<i>Nurture</i>	<i>To Sustain</i>
<i>Change</i>	<i>Movement</i>	<i>Justice</i>
<i>Mercy</i>	<i>Replication</i>	<i>Success</i>
<i>Significance</i>	<i>To Explore</i>	<i>To Know</i>
<i>To Create</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>	<i>Perfection</i>
<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Other?</i>	

Calling, Contribution, Work

- God calls us first to himself and then to a whole life of love and service to others. Work is just one part of our lives, and yet, we can often expect more of work than it can deliver.

Discuss how the longings you circled might or might not be fulfilled within your work context. Which of them, if any, might be better fulfilled within the larger sphere of God's "whole life" call to doing good, and which might only be fulfilled within God's personal call on you to Himself?



Life Purpose

- Finally, review the life purpose statement you wrote at the very beginning of this study, in the Introduction section (pp. 5–7). What has changed? What has stayed the same? Rewrite your sense of calling here and discuss. At this point, you may want to write a two-part statement, with one part that reflects God's purpose within your

occupation and another that you feel strongly about no matter what setting you are in. For example...

“At work, I hope to build and restore communities in the light of the Kingdom of God through the design and service of city infrastructure. In all of life, I want to ‘love the person in front of me’ through acts of kindness and ‘going the extra mile.’”

“As a teacher, I want to educate and inspire disadvantaged children in my community. I also want to rescue and restore women who have been sexually exploited through sex trafficking and abuse.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY AND REVIEW

Look back over the suggested memory verses in each session. Which have been most meaningful, challenging and/or encouraging to you as you consider your vocation?

Consider reviewing the verse(s) you selected on a regular basis as a way to fortify your convictions.

PAUSE TO PRAY

Take time alone to pray. Listen to God. Do you find yourself wrestling, disquieted, frustrated or peaceful? Expectant or hopeful? Talk to Him about it. When it seems right, ask Him for courage and His presence as you seek to live out your convictions as a *Kingdom Citizen* and an exile. When you are finished, if you are in a group, pray together as a group. Please do not rush this time before God.

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

How do you feel about being a small part of God's great story throughout creation and the broad history of human work? Is your small role meaningful to you? Explain.

Download and read the short essay, "Success, Significance and Meaning," (available in Book FOUR of the *Wharf and Bearings* series at www.ralphennis.com/wharf-and-bearings-series.html). How meaningful is your daily work to you? What is the basis of that meaning? Explain.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

TIMELINE

This study is divided into nine sessions. The first introduces the skills needed and includes an exercise on calling that will be referred to in later studies.

Most sessions can be discussed in approximately one hour, though the second session will be longer if you choose to view the Daniel movie (1 hour and 28 minutes) together and then discuss it as a group. The last session includes a fair amount of reflection and review of previous work. You may want to encourage people to do at least some of this review beforehand.

DISCUSSING QUESTIONS

To make leading the study easier for people with many different levels of experience, we have written more questions than most groups will be able to cover. This study does not present a comprehensive theology of work and vocation.¹ **The central goal of this study is to build convictions.** Good leadership of this kind of study will require high attention to facilitating good discussion and less worry about making sure every question gets answered. Sometimes, you will find that the best questions are the ones not on the page but the ones that are raised in the discussion itself.

Many of the questions in the study are designed to encourage participants to process their convictions in the context of their vocations. Because the focus is on application, often, there is no one right answer. As you lead the discussion, do not worry if there is some initial ambiguity. Ambiguity at the beginning often leads to more thoughtful and deeper convictions as time passes.

EXPERT OR FACILITATOR?

You do not have to be an expert leader or a teacher with all the answers to facilitate and guide these discussion sessions. Rather, consider yourself a fellow journeyer in the group. The goal is not to teach but to explore and discover together.

Jesus often guided a conversation through asking questions. A primary skill of a good facilitator is the ability to listen to other people's responses and ask follow-up questions. This skill requires the discipline of listening well. On the other hand, do not be afraid of being part of the discussion yourself. From time to time, share your thoughts as well.

¹ For a broader study, please see A Biblical Perspective on Calling, Vocation and Work.

OTHER RESOURCES

Other resources from the Navigators' *God's Calling and Your Vocation* series:

Nehemiah: When God's Call Comes Calling at Work by Wayne Kuna

A Biblical Perspective on Calling, Vocation and Work by Ronni Bernardi, Dean Storelli and John Teten

Exploring Your Life Purpose, a workbook to help you understand yourself and your life purpose.

Other works by Ralph Ennis are available at www.ralphennis.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ralph Ennis is a long-time staff member of The Navigators,¹ serving in collegiate, military, city, church, international missions and leadership development contexts. In addition to focusing on the merciful love of God, ministry across cultures and whole-life discipleship, he has published works on intercultural decision making, ethical AI (artificial intelligence), self-assessment inventories, shame and using images in ministry. Ralph's vocational journey includes teaching mathematics, designing HVAC systems and starting a small publishing and consulting business. He and his wife Jennifer live in Raleigh, NC. They have four married children and fifteen grandchildren.

Special thanks to Dean Storelli for his editorial help and friendship!

¹ The Navigators® is a Christian ministry established in 1933 to help others come to know Jesus Christ and be more like Him as they navigate through life—a goal captured by The Navigators motto, “to Know Christ and to Make Him Known®.”