



SESSION 2

GOD'S PLAN IS BEST

BIBLE STORY: Daniel Chose God's Way (Daniel 1)

SOME PEOPLE SAY: Do what makes you happy.

GOD SAYS: My plan for you is even better.

TODAY'S POINT: God's plan is best.

THEME VERSE: Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. *Romans 12:2*

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. *Romans 12:2 (KJV)*

BONUS VERSE: Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. *Proverbs 3:5-6*

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. *Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)*

BIBLE BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a vacation or event where everything went wrong and your plans were spoiled? Maybe you went to the beach and it rained the entire time. Maybe you planned to host your first family Thanksgiving meal. Everyone showed up on time and you managed to burn most of the meal. In the moment, there was nothing fun or funny about it. But now that you are removed from the moment, you see the humor and several lessons that you were able to learn along the way.

Today's session focuses on four individuals who sought to live out God's plan. Chaos was going on around them, nothing happened according to how they probably thought their lives would go, yet they still sought to apply the truths they had learned from God and His Word. Others had departed from what they knew to be God's plan, but the actions of others did not deter these four from faithfully living out God's plan. While following God's plan may have been difficult, it was worth it for these four as God richly rewarded them for their faithfulness.

GOD'S PLAN IS BEST, EVEN DURING CHAOS (DANIEL 1:1-7)

Most of us prefer stability over chaos. The chaos of a traffic jam in rush hour can push us over the edge. The stability of a good doctor's report after our annual checkup is always a welcome relief. Even though we may prefer stability, we know that chaos is inevitable in this life. When chaos does occur, we can either trust in ourselves or trust in God's truth and His plan.

Daniel's home, Judah, was in chaos more than a century before today's session opens. God sent several prophets to warn that the evil in Judah would lead to the nation falling. He even specifically mentioned Babylon as the source of the punishment. Sometime between 705–701 BC, the prophet Isaiah warned Judah's king that one day Babylon would plunder all of his treasures and take away his descendants (Isaiah 39). God called Jeremiah to begin prophesying and warned him of an invasion from the north, later identified as Babylon. These warnings let the people of Judah know that they had stepped outside of God's boundaries and that if they did not turn away from the evil they were doing, they would be destroyed. One warning shows the type of evil they were committing. In 605 BC, Jeremiah said that God had sent prophet after prophet to say:

“Turn, each of you, from your evil way of life and from your evil deeds. Live in the land the LORD gave to you and your ancestors long ago and forever. Do not follow other gods to serve them and to bow in worship to them, and do not anger me by the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm. But you have not obeyed me—this is the LORD's declaration—‘with the result that you have angered me by the work of your hands and brought disaster on yourselves.’” Jeremiah 25:5-7

So Judah was filled with the chaos of evil, and after years of patience, God sent His punishment. In 605 BC, He allowed Nebuchadnezzar to lay siege on Jerusalem and carry vessels from the house of God, along with some of the royal family and nobles, back to Babylon. This included Daniel and his companions.

Scripture doesn't mention Daniel's emotions, but Psalm 137, written sometime later, tells of the great sorrow some Jews held captive in Babylon felt. It's easy to imagine the feeling of mourning from being carried so far from home. We can empathize with these captives.

Through it all, Daniel and his companions followed God's plan. But they still experienced the chaos. If we know that we are going to experience chaos even when we are following God, how can we say that God's plan is best?

One answer requires us to ask where the chaos comes from. In some cases, chaos comes directly from our sin. In other cases, it is a part of our world because sin is part of our world. And as we saw in Session 1, sin is in our world because Adam and Eve chose to step outside the protective boundaries that God set.

The second answer to this question is another question. When have you grown the most in your faith? Many of us have to admit that our greatest growth took place when we were experiencing the most amount of chaos and pain. Some of us grew when we went through the passing of a loved one. Others have grown as a direct result of a difficult diagnosis. Still others grew when they lost their jobs during the pandemic. Pain can draw us closer to God as we seek His comfort, guidance, and healing. We did not enjoy the chaos, but now that we are through it we can see God's hand on us, and we are grateful for His presence through the chaos and struggle.

GOD'S PLAN IS BEST, EVEN WHEN OTHERS DO NOT FOLLOW (DANIEL 1:8-16)

Do you have a child or grandchild who hates being sent to her room? Why? All her toys are in her room. One would think that being sent to her room would be a treat. Yet, the opposite is true. The mere threat of being sent to her room will yield a complete change in attitude and behavior. The threat is not being sent to her room, but rather being alone and missing what everyone else is doing.

Daniel was alone in a crowd. He was surrounded by young Jewish men who had grown up with the same training and religious background as him, yet while some were willing to forsake God's plan, Daniel and his friends were not.

But what was God's plan? Daniel asked to eat only vegetables and drink water. Is God's plan for all of us to become vegetarians? No! Scholars say that the king's food would have likely included foods that went against Jewish law such as pork and horseflesh, along with wine that had been sacrificed to false Babylonian gods. It was food fit for a pagan king!

Yet Daniel did not let the fear of missing something that seemed good or being the only one to stand up for God's plan stop him from doing what he knew to be right. The Bible says that "Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food" (Daniel 1:8). Scripture does not indicate that Daniel grew angry or scolded those who did choose to defile themselves. Scripture merely points out that he chose to do what he knew to be right and that he was joined by three companions: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Some people today would say that we should do whatever makes us happy. They establish it as their creed by which to live. It does not matter to them if it contradicts what we know God has clearly articulated in His Word. Those who embrace this mindset place themselves above God's teachings. They may do so for their own comfort or because they are afraid of being alone and going against the world. We should be encouraged by what we see in God's Word. Daniel took a stand, and he was determined to do so no matter what others did. As he took this stand, others were willing to stand up for God's plan too. We would be wise to determine in our hearts to take a stand on God's Word as well.

GOD'S PLAN HAS THE BEST RESULTS (DANIEL 1:17-21)

Following God's plan did not immediately lift Daniel and his companions out of Babylon and transport them home. It did not solve all of their problems. But it did lead to a good gift from God. Verse 17 indicates that "God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding" beyond that of their fellow students. The key word here is *gave*. The verse would be much different if the word *earned* was used. Earned is a direct result of hard work and endurance. The word here, however, is *gave*. This shows that the knowledge and understanding were gifts and not earned.

Much as we may wish it, serving God does not always get us exactly what we want or what we think will solve all our problems. But serving God does lead to an even better result than we could ever imagine. It may lead to a friend seeing your actions and asking questions about how to follow Christ. It may lead to you getting a job that is a better fit for your calling and gifting than you could have dreamed up on your own. It will definitely lead to a closer relationship with Christ than if you were simply choosing whatever you thought would make you happy.

The key to this result is trusting in God's plan and His goodness no matter the circumstances around us.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

- We would all agree that we live in a world full of chaos. All we need to do is watch the news when we get home. The question is how do we learn to trust God and His perfect plan amidst chaos? What did you learn from the way Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah navigated their chaos while trusting in God's plan?
- As Daniel and his companions followed God's plan, God provided specific things to help them fulfill His plan. What specific tools is the Lord providing you to fulfill His plan? Are you using those tools for His glory? What might He be calling you to do differently?