

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

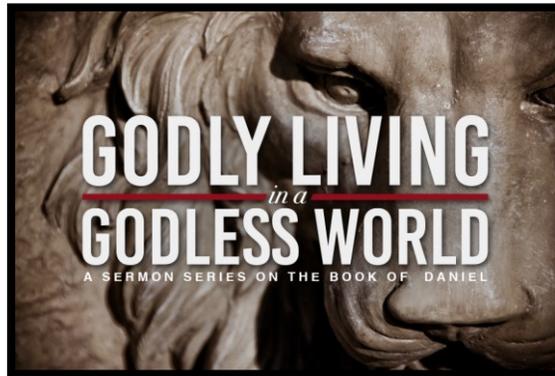
Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 4:1-9

Written By

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Jesus, the lover of our souls, is always in hot pursuit of redeeming those who lives desperately need redemption. Take E. Howard Cale, as a case study.

Howard's parents were spiritually unequally yoked. His father was an non-Christian man consumed with alcohol. His mother was a devout follower of Jesus Christ. You can guess which parent the young man emulated: his faithless father. By the age of 12, Howard drank like a fish, enjoyed sex and gambling, and eventually joined a mid-western crime syndicate.

Howard careened down the path of sin with one statement from his mother he could never shake, "Always remember, son, that at eight o'clock every night I'll be kneeling beside your bed, asking God to protect my precious boy." One evening God used that prayer to awaken the sinner. In an outburst of uncontrolled anger, Howard pulled a pistol on a man and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened The weapon misfired. He remembers looking at his watch. It was eight o'clock sharp. What a strange coincidence, he thought.

Not long thereafter, his health failed and a doctor gave him the bad news. He only had about six months left to live. He couldn't believe the prognosis. Mentally and emotionally numb he stumbled home and fell into his mother's arms and said, "Mother, I've broken your heart. I'd like to be saved, but I've sinned too much." The old woman opened her Bible and read from Isaiah 1:18, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." That windy morning on March 14, 1914, E. Howard Cadle traded a stained soul for a pristine soul by placing his faith in the Savior who wouldn't let him go.

God granted him physical life in addition to spiritual life, so Howard turned his criminal skills over to God and allowed God to use him however He wished. Eventually, he became a successful businessman who gave 75 percent of his earning to the Lord's work. His specialty in giving was supporting the evangelistic work of one Gipsy Smith, a powerful speaker who led thousands to faith in the Savior. Later, Howard used his voice on Cincinnati's powerful WLW to preach about the story of the Savior who had redeemed the likes of him. When he died, he had become, in his day and age, one of our country's most effective evangelists. And it all started with a Savior who wouldn't let him go.

Such is the faith journey and faith story of E. Howard Cadle.

What is your faith journey? If Christ is your Savior, I'm sure you have one which clearly tells of how Jesus, the lover of your soul, pursued you in a variety of ways.

In Daniel chapter 4, King Nebuchadnezzar, the most unlikely person to become a believer in the living God, comes to faith in the most profound fashion after the most tumultuous, lengthy life journey. From the moment he invaded Israel in 606-605 B.C. to well into his 43 year reign, the man who thought he had it all, realized just how spiritually bankrupt his life was as God supernaturally worked to arrest his spiritual attention. Amazing, isn't it? We tend, as believers, to pull away and isolate ourselves from those wealthy, powerful, godless, self-consumed, progressively agenda driven faithless folks whose lives are living examples of opposition to the living God. Such is not God's tactic. Instead of pulling away, He pulls alongside of these spiritually vacuous ... and sometimes vicious ... people in order to woo them to the cross of His son, Jesus.

You can't help but see how God grabbed King Nebuchadnezzar's attention.

- It started with a food fight with four young Jewish men who wouldn't eat the food dedicated to his glorious gods (Daniel 1). They chose to be vegetarians and ended up being and looking physically and mentally better than all the other sorcery candidates. He must have thought, "How can this be?" This event probably occurred around 606 B.C., and it served to cause the king to probably think, "These Israelite young men are different. How did they maintain their physical and mental ability by going with vegetarianism?" The event, however, didn't move him to faith.
- Two years later (604-603 B.C.) God gave him a disturbing dream of a massive metallic statues. He found out through one of those captive Jewish young men, Daniel, that God was informing him of the coming demise of his glorious, powerful empire (Daniel 2). He must have thought, "There is no way this Jew knew what I dreamed when I didn't disclose it unless he had a connection with the living God." But *still* he did not worship that God.
- Some eighteen years later (585-586 B.C.), he built a golden image and demanded everyone to worship it, or be cast into a furnace of fire. When three of his Jewish political appointees and friends of Daniel didn't bow, in they went. The only problem was God miraculously delivered them. Blown away by the miracles, he praised the God of the Jews, but *still* he didn't embrace that God in repentant faith.

As we approach Daniel 4, some fifteen years have slipped by (570-571 B.C. is calculated based on the fact he had finished his massive building programs), and King Nebuchadnezzar *still* embraced his false value system. His massive and costly building projects are all but complete, and he is consumed with his ability and his accomplishments above all else. Unfortunately, the fire of faith, which just about ignited in his life after the fiery furnace event, was quenched by his inexorable love affair with his power, prestige, performance and polytheism.

God, however, isn't about to let this carnal, godless man slip into eternity without one more divinely ordered, worldview shattering life event. It will prove to be the one event which will awaken the slumbering sinner, resulting in a new spiritual birth. It will also be a story embedded in Scripture designed to teach all of us one major spiritual truth:

God Seeks In Order To Save (Daniel 4:1-18)

We know Nebuchadnezzar eventually bowed his knee in faith to the living God based on what we read in this tremendous, highly personal passage. From a rhetorical perspective, he begins (*anfang* in German) and ends (*ende* in German) his personal testimony of redemption with free-flowing praise to God. This is called *inclusio*, and it acts like a beautiful bow on a priceless package. To listen to his opening words is to hear from a man who can't believe God loved him enough to continue to work on him until he came to a point of transformative and redemptive life:

¹ Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound!" ² "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me." ³ "How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation.

When you get saved from sin, you can't help but want to tell others. And it doesn't matter if you are an introvert or an extrovert. When God wipes away your sin, giving you a clean life and a new life, words of worship and joy for what He has done for you will just flow from your lips. That's what we read here.

Once spiritual life replaced spiritual death, King Nebuchadnezzar couldn't wait to tell everyone in his kingdom what happened. So, he composed a letter in their languages so they, too, could come to know the Savior who loves them as well. In our day this is tantamount to sending out an e-mail, a text, or jumping on *Facebook* or *Twitter*.

Briefly, underscore the king's new theological insights: (1) He now knows the living God performed outright miracles to grab his attention. And he realizes God did this, as he says, for me. Such are the nature of God's signs to you. They will either draw you to Him in faith as you recognize it is statistically impossible for these events to be just pure chance, or they will, as in the case of Pharaoh, cause you to retreat further into your false belief system (Exodus 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27). All of this leads to a logical question, What supernatural events has God dropped into your life to cause you to reflect on the condition of your soul and His eternal provision for you? (2) He know knows the Jewish God is the God above all so-called gods. This truth is validated by the name he gives God, "the Most High" or *Elaha Eillaya* (עֵלֵיָא)

אֱלֹהֵינוּ). It's a God-construct employed in this book at various junctures (Daniel 3:26, 4:2; 5:18, 21). The emphasis rests upon the fact there is no God greater or higher than this amazing, spectacular God. The mere statement also clearly illustrates the king had, now, laid to rest his false notion of pantheism, opting to embrace the logical reality of monotheism. (3) He now knows that his kingdom, as massive and powerful as it was, was merely temporary and terrestrial in light of God's eternal and celestial kingdom. What a flash of rare insight from the most powerful politician on the planet at the time. *Finally*, instead of vying for and consolidating political power and prestige, he realized its utter vacuous nature in light of the true King of Kings. That King was, in fact, the true, eternal King above all Kings (1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 10:16; 29:10; 74:12; Jeremiah 10:10; Lamentations 5:19). Oh, for more leaders who would stop fighting among themselves as they strive to hold onto power, humble themselves before the throne of the living God. The amazing thing is that no matter how evil they have been, how godless their rule, how arrogant and self-consumed they are, how morally digressive their leadership has been, and how they have arduously worked to replace spiritual and moral light with darkness God is working in their lives to call them to be people of real, transformative, redemptive faith.

When King Nebuchadnezzar finally spiritually woke up, the praise, then, just naturally poured out of his mouth. He didn't care what anyone thought about him. He didn't care what the papers or pundits would say. He didn't care about what people would say on the gossip circuit. He didn't care what the reporters would report on the local shows. He didn't care what the pollsters would say either. He didn't care what opportunities might not ever come his way again. No, when he finally saw how God had supernaturally worked in his life to wake him up, he embraced that Savior in ardent, joyous, I've-got-to-tell-everyone kind of faith.

Folks. Listen up. This is why we have to pray for our leaders. God is working in and on their lives. Imagine what can happen in this country if one by one leaders, who we never thought in a million years, would walk with God, would lay their godless, sinful worldviews at His nail-scarred feet and worship Him. This is also why we cannot ever isolate ourselves, as bearers of the light of the gospel, from those godless, sometimes powerful people who don't know Him. God worked supernaturally over the course of many years to awaken this godless politician, and He employed the voices of four deeply committed saints to help in that process. Imagine that. They were not isolated from the king. They were part of his wicked world and they were always ready to speak up and out for God ... even in the face of great personal cost. Might we do the same and thereby become part of the faith journey of our own King Nebuchadnezzar.

Praise to God. This is what comes forth from a life touched by the hand of the Savior, Jesus. A re-telling of the exciting faith journey also is a natural occurrence. As I will show you over the next few weeks, there were ten facets to King Nebuchadnezzar's walk into the kingdom of God. If you are an unbeliever, a non-Christian today, it is my prayer you might see yourself at some point of this journey, for the same Savior who loved this particular prickly Babylonian is the same one who loves you. And if you are a believer, a follower of Jesus Christ, I challenge you to ask yourself one key question as we consider this testimonial narrative: Am I willing to say what needs sayin' to the person who is searching for ultimate meaning and purpose in life? Will you be brave and courageous with the gospel, even in the face of possible opposition and ridicule?

With all this introductory information in mind, I can't wait to introduce you to the steps in King Nebuchadnezzar's which led him to a saving faith. To better appreciate and identify with his lengthy journey, we'll personalize it because what happened to him is what happens to those God seeks to save.

You'll Encounter A Ripple (Daniel 4:4-5)

What do I mean by this? I mean God will send something or someone your way to cause you to see your current belief system might just have a few uncomfortable holes. Yes, the arguments and rationalizations which have kept you far from illogical faith in Jesus for years all of a sudden are not so airtight and impregnable as you once thought. Now, you see incongruities and glaring inconsistencies and you, really, do not know what to do about it. You philosophically believe one way; however, the problem is your philosophy does not square nicely with life. All of this results in a definite and bothersome tension you do not know how to resolve. Nebuchadnezzar experienced this revelatory reality:

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream and it made me fearful; and these fantasies as I lay on my bed and the visions in my mind kept alarming me

By placing the personal pronoun first in the sentence, followed by the king's name, emphasis is placed on the statement grammatically (אֲנִי נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר). It's as if the king says, "I, me, of all people, was simply relaxing in my exquisite mansion one evening, as I typically do, when I fell asleep and had a dream which rocked my world. Yeah, just when things were quite normal is when the abnormal unexpectedly occurred." Sense the tension? It's like the king says, "I was enjoying my typical materialistic life, and then BAM, one vivid, disturbing dream, of all things, rocked my calm, well-ordered world."

When I graduated from college and married Liz, I started reading the Christian apologist, Francis Schaeffer. During that honeymoon period, I poured over one book in particular which helped me understand the godless world I live in as God's ambassador. The book is appropriately titled *The God Who Is There*. If you haven't read it, you should. Schaeffer does a masterful job illustrating how Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard created godless philosophical systems which formed a barrier between faith and the truly rational and logical belief. He rightfully calls their line of reasoning "the line of despair," because while the philosophical systems sound so profitable in theory (or in the classroom) they provide man with no lasting, logical life answers, leaving him, ultimately in a state of complete, nagging despair. This is the tension. His godless, well-ordered, well-thought-out system, be what it may, sounds good on paper but doesn't work well in life. Regarding this situation, Schaeffer remarks,

It is impossible for any non-Christian individual or group to be consistent to their system in logical or in practice. Thus, when you face twentieth-century man, whether he is brilliant or an ordinary man of the street, a man of the university or

the docks, you are facing a man in tension; and it is this tension which works on your behalf as you speak to him.¹

How true. For example, on the one hand, they will arrogantly smile as they articulate their formidable worship, and then, on the other hand, when probed, they will realize that logical implosion is fast approaching.

Take, for instance, a statement from a debate by Dr. Norman Geisler:

I vividly remember my first debate with an atheist, at Lake County Community College, north of Chicago. He claimed the untold evil in the world demonstrates that there cannot possibly be a God. When I asked by what moral standard he was making this judgment, he immediately realized he was on the horns of a dilemma. If he admitted there is an ultimate moral law by which he knew the world to be evil, then this would lead to an ultimate Moral Lawgiver. If he denied an objective moral law, then this would seem to wipe away any solid grounds for his complaint against God.

His answer was frank but shocking: “I don’t have any ultimate moral law by which I am making my judgment that this world is evil. My conclusion is simply based on my own benign moral feeling.” Of course, had I said my basis for believing in God was not based on any objective evidence—only my own benign moral feeling—I would have been laughed off the platform.²

See the tension with the atheist adherent? His philosophical system sounds so nice, tidy, and logical until you start asking real-life, rubber-meets-the-road questions. Then it starts imploding, by definition, because it is a false, inconsistent worldview, unlike that of Christianity. The dilemma of this tension is brought out well by Schaeffer when he remarks, “The more logical a man is to his own presuppositions, the further he is from the real world; and the nearer he is to the real world, the more illogical he is to his presuppositions.”³ How true. How powerful. It is cognitive tension like this which can lead a person to a faith relationship with the living God.

This is exactly what occurred in King Nebuchadnezzar’s life by God’s timely direction. With one well-devised dream the Lord started deconstructing the King’s inconsistent and erroneous world-view. I have a hunch the same living God may just be doing that in your life right now. That is most uncomfortable, but exciting as well because it can guide you to Him as you realize the horns of the dilemma you truly face with your current vacuous belief system. So, what about it? Are you facing a ripple or two in your epistemology? Great.

When people start realizing they don’t have answers to live effectively by, they will typically do what King Nebuchadnezzar did next. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you’re thinking about this course of action.

You Will Encounter Reticence (Daniel 4:6-7)

¹ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove: InverVarsity Press, 1979), 122.

² Norman Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 11.

³ Schaeffer, *He Is There And He Is Not Silent*, p. 123.

Who will you find pulling away from your problematic questions? Who will not want to be open and honest about what you are thinking or experiencing? Who will not be there for you cognitively and philosophically when it starts becoming apparent your philosophical approach to life is leaking big-time? Your peers, or key people in your life, who share your viewpoint. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

⁶ So I gave orders to bring into my presence all the wise men of Babylon, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners came in and I related the dream to them, but they could not make its interpretation known to me.

I find the King's approach most instructive. These are the same counselors he went to years ago when God gave him the disturbing dream about the massive metallic statue. You will remember that statue represented Nebuchadnezzar's empire as the head of gold, and then after him all world empires degenerative until the coming of God (Daniel 2). Remember, he wanted these diviners to tell him what he dreamt without telling them anything about the dream. They couldn't perform either, because they really didn't have a connection with the living God, while Daniel, the Christian did. We all know how that part of the story turned out. God gave Daniel all the hidden knowledge he needed to prove to the king there is a God above his limited pantheon of puny gods.

What is most shocking is the king went back to these same spiritually misguided, deceived men. I guess Peter was correct when he said, "*It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'a sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire'*" (2 Peter 2:22). Isn't this the truth? When our comfortable but erroneous view of life is rocked by real, consistent logic coupled with biblical truth, we are tempted to go back to the same peers, friends, and so forth who we leaned on and learned from to get this faulty and inconsistent viewpoint in the first place.

Pay attention to how this works. When you start realizing, as you grow older and attempt to raise a family while staying true to your post-modern mindset, you begin to see unwanted cracks forming as you face real life issues. If there really is not over-arching spiritual story of all stories, if absolute truth does not, in fact, absolutely exist, if all morals are relative to each person, if illogical attitude is more important than logical argument, if language really has no absolute intrinsic value, then we have real problems if we are honest. What do I tell a daughter who wants to do things which are off the moral grid? How do I have any real moral base when none supposedly exists? Then why am I so upset by moral infractions all around me? Or why am I upset about people who won't bend and change their moral structures? If everything is relative, then I should be open to any and all forms of behavior, governance and the like, but this is a problem because you're an attorney. You cannot even do your job if there is no unchanging truth.

So what happens when cracks start forming? You go back to the same people who fed you the wrong thinking in the first place. You go back to the same authors who gave you your new enlightened thinking. Yes, you go back to these people in hopes they will be able to quieten your cognitive fears about your leaky belief system. Wake up, like the king did. These folks will not be able to assist you with long-term, life-changing, and peace-giving answers.

Who should you go to? To the person God has placed in your life who fears, knows and walks with Him. For Nebuchadnezzar, that was Daniel. He enters the regal stage in verse 8 where we encounter the third part of the king's journey to faith.

You'll Encounter A Revealer (Daniel 4:8-9)

Who is the revealer? As I've said, he or she is someone who loves and worships God, and that same God has sovereignly brought them into your life at some strategic point. You know who they are. Their name is on the tip of your tongue right now. They are your Daniel. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

⁸ “But finally Daniel came in before me, whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and I related the dream to him, saying, ⁹ ‘O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell me the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.

Why did Daniel come in last? A couple of reasons. One, as the head of the divination class, it could have been proper for the underlings to make a valiant attempt at helping the king before he arrived. Two, Daniel could have purposefully laid back in order to increase the theological/spiritual tension. If that is what he did, it was a wise, calculated move. He helped set up a situation where the king could, once more, see the absolute bankruptcy of his pagan, polytheistic belief system.

Once Daniel entered the room, Nebuchadnezzar waxed eloquent about this man's spiritual prowess. The king knew, from years of watching him in action and seeing him do the humanly impossible that this man did, in fact, know and walk with a living God. So, when he absolutely needed answers to his personal dilemma, he knew exactly who to call: Daniel.

Many of you laugh at me when I tell you all the different jobs I've had over the years. Someone always says, “What job haven't you done?” Good question. Basically, in order to survive in college and grad school I did anything and everything I could to survive and to care for my family, once I became a married man. And my strategy was clear. I always purposefully chose jobs working with really rough, questionable people.

- My first summer after my freshman year in college, I worked in a rail-yard at a cantaloupe factory icing down train cars full of cantaloupes bound for the East Coast. My co-worker, Larry, typically dropped acid before we started work each day.
- During my Junior and Senior years in college at Azusa Pacific, I sold lake and deep sea boats for Mar-Cher marine in El Monte. In many respects it was a dog eat dog mentality when it came to getting and closing deals. I, on the other hand, chose to be open and honest with the folks as they came in.
- When I was first married, I worked on an all Hispanic landscape crew in Northern, California. I was the only Gringo, but I learned how to work hard with these great men, but when they partied after work, I headed

home. *Por favor, no de cerveza para mí. Yo soy un cristiano.* No cervasa/beer for me. I am a Christian.

- While at Dallas Theological Seminary, I worked for the commercial division of Allied Van Lines. Believe me, the people I worked with must have just been released from Huntsville prison.
- After seminary, I worked for a year packing and loading trucks in a warehouse which serviced big box stationary stores. Again, I worked with some people with really messed up lives.

Why do I tell you all this? (And there many more jobs I did to survive.) Through all of this exposure to men with nicknames like Jack Hammer, I learned that at the end of the day, when their lives fell apart, when their marriages went south, when their kids acted up, and when they didn't have joy in life, they would pull me off to the side for an honest, open conversation. I, like Daniel, always looked forward to those moments to share the wonders of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I still covet those times. Do you?

I also tell you these stories to say this: God loves you so much I know He has providentially placed a Daniel in your life right now, a person who knows Him and has answers you desperately need. What do you need to do? Get real, call him into the room with you, and be open and honest about the tension in your life which is tearing you up. You talk, and then he'll talk. Listen good because this will prove to be one of the most important life conversations you will ever had.

I know that's true because that's exactly what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.