



# Sermon-Based Small Group Leader Notes

For the week of February 12, 2012 (week 5 of 10)

## Introduction

### Topic

Sermon Title: "Living Beyond Anxiety"

Sermon Series: *Flow* (week 5 of 7)

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7

Sermon by: Dr. Tom Harrington

### Goals for This Gathering

1. To explore how the Holy Spirit helps us face stressful times with faith, not anxiety and fear
2. To discuss the homework
3. To pray together

### Prayer

- Take prayer requests and praises
- Pray for all Small Groups meeting at Northwest and in homes
- Pray for the spiritual growth of your group
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you trust him more completely with your entire life
- Pray that you will be a bold witness to your God's ability to intervene, even if he chooses not to do so

## Getting Started

**Questions 1 and 2:** These two opening questions help participants start thinking and sharing along the general themes of stress, fear, comfort, living boldly, and making choices.

As always, try to encourage participants to save the deeper, more spiritual answers for deeper in the study. The icebreaker fosters connections as people get to know more about each other's lives and backgrounds.

## Into the Bible

Overview of Daniel, chapters 1 and 3

*Leader – Read to your group:*

"Today we will be looking at the life of three young Jewish men who were taken to Babylon when their homeland, Judah, was defeated in 605 B.C. Upon arriving in Babylon, they, along with other young Israelite men, were taken to the palace where they were given Babylonian names, led through physical training, educated, and fed from the king's table to prepare them to one day serve in the king's palace. Their story is recorded in the Old Testament book of Daniel, named for another young Judean man and friend to the three central characters in today's study. These three are

best known for their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

"The reason this episode in history and these men are the focus of this week's study is because they exemplify people who lived beyond, not under, their circumstances. The stress of living in exile could have withered their courage. Instead, they recognized tests to their convictions and responded by modeling self-discipline and unwavering trust in God. What was their secret? Can we learn anything from these young men that could help us live with power and in the flow of God's Spirit in us?"

Ask someone to read Daniel 3:1–2, 4–6.

**Question 5:** In which area/s of your life do you feel the most tested? Think of a time when the struggle to stand on your convictions created great anxiety. Now, think of a time when your resolve was strengthened. What made the difference?

These can be any kind of convictions: spiritual, work-related ethics, family relations, etc. Some people might choose to share specific instances when they have felt tested to stand their ground. Encourage sharing while maintaining a "solution-free" zone within the group.

The king was "furious," called for the men, and gave them an ultimatum: worship the image or be burned alive (v.13-15).

Ask someone to read Daniel 3:16-18

**Question 6:** What is most notable to you about their response to the king?

It is important to note that these young men were standing before an infuriated king who literally held their lives in his hands. It was in this setting that they made their bold assertion. They were absolutely certain of God's ability to save, even if they did not know whether it was God's will to intervene in this instance. Regardless of God's action on their behalf, they declared their allegiance to worship him alone.

**Question 7:** What can we learn about the relationship between fear and faith from the response of these young men?

Consider v. 18: We are not told whether the men conferred before responding to the king, whether they were all three equally brave in the face of mortal danger, or whether they received a supernatural gift of courage that they recognized as exceeding their normal level of faith. What we do know is that the power of the Holy Spirit was manifest in each of

them, a power that even King Nebuchadnezzar recognized as strengthening them to defy his orders.

## Digging Deeper

**Question 8: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not stand alone. Not only did they support each other, they followed the example of many ancestors who had faced life-threatening dilemmas, and they realized God's presence. What implications does this have for you as you face times that are seemingly devoid of peace?**

Remembering that we are not alone is essential to facing the trials of this life. Many have gone before us, fighting similar battles. Christians are united to the body of Christ, the Church, through epochs of history and around the world. Christians are strengthened as we meet together, studying God's word, sharing our lives, and praying for each other. There is nowhere that we can go that is out of the reach of our Triune God.

**Question 9: We mature in Christ as we live *in* the flow and act *out* of the flow of the Holy Spirit. What part do the choices we exercise play in leading to a life filled with love, power and self-discipline?**

Allow time for rich sharing. It might be of interest to the group to note that, in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, this was not the first time they had resisted the status quo at the palace. Chapter 1, part of which was summarized at the beginning of today's study, goes on to describe their request to consume food and drink, not as the king mandated, but in accordance with their own religious laws. It took courage, trust in God, and self-discipline to make that appeal. Simply put, these young Israelites *practiced* giving witness to God's will for their life.

*Daniel 1:15* "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food" (NIV).

**Optional question: How do the choices we make in the face of anxiety shape us?**

**Question 10: During the course of this week's sermon or today's study, did you gain any fresh insights? Any that might impact the way you think about anxious times, fear, faith, and love, to name a few?**

## Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Leader, consider reading this Psalm to close prayer time.

### Psalm 139

<sup>1</sup> You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you because  
I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.

<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.

<sup>19</sup> If only you, God, would slay the wicked!  
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!

<sup>20</sup> They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.

<sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?

<sup>22</sup> I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting. (NIV)