

Series - Living For God 24-7 (part 6 of 8)

Date/s - 19 Feb 2017

Topic - Daniel 4 – The Sovereignty of God

Speaker/s - Pastor Ernie Song

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like “Glorify You Alone” (Gateway) and Our God Reigns”

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Recognise the Sovereignty of God over their situations.
2. Learn how to appropriate our spiritual authority in our lives.

Word [45 min]

Pastor Ernie related the historical context of the book of Daniel briefly. In chapter 4, we read that although King Nebuchadnezzar was forewarned about the misfortune that would befall him because of his pride, he still did not heed the warning given by Daniel. The message to the original audience (the Jews) can be summed up that God is still sovereign in spite of the suffering, the tough circumstances under the Babylonian empire. During those times, kings were often treated as gods by the people.

To understand the sovereignty of God, we look at if everything is pre-determined. This means that everything is sort of fixed and planned to happen, implying that we can let life be without taking an active approach to our living and choices. It is living life as it is even if it means less than desirable or not according to God's will. For example, when we fall sick we would just accept that it is destined. We would also miss out on opportunities deserving our attention if we are contended as pre-determined. Such a view can be quite problematic. We can start to question God's goodness. How can we understand God as our good Father? What about free will? And why do we need to stand in judgement before God if the way we behaved were already pre-determined too? The result of such a view is passivity.

On other hand, we might think everything that happens is determined by the choices we make. With this view, we live a life being independent from God with a “everything depends on me” mentality. We can be fearful in living since we will be pressurized to always strive to live a ‘better’ life.

What can be the correct approach?

- a) God is a Good Father (1 John 1:5, James 1:17, Psalm 92:15) and that bad things do not originate from Him. It is not His will. So, why do bad things happen?
 - It is the work of the devil, that is, spiritual warfare. From Job 1: 6-12 & 2:1-6, we learnt that the devil cannot do anything to cause harm on believers unless God allows it. God was the one asking Satan to consider Job. This suggests that God has great confidence in Job and it is God's will for Job to stay righteous and to stand firm despite the difficult trials upon him.
 - We live in a fallen world that is filled with sinners like ourselves. People commit sin and affect other people too. For example, it is not God's will when a child got killed by a car. The origin of evil things is

from the devil who came to kill, steal and destroy.

- It is self. Very often, sinful desires, pride, temptation can lead us into bad situations. For example, a person suffering from liver cancer could have resulted from an unhealthy lifestyle. God can use bad situations to mould us:
 - i. In the Old Testament times, the people were under the Old Covenant and God could execute judgment. However, under the New Covenant where Christ has already taken the penalty of sin on the Cross; believers no longer suffer the judgment of sin. However, we still have to take responsibility for the consequences. (2 Corinthians 5:19; Hebrews 8:12; Romans 8:1).
 - ii. From Hebrews 12:6, we know this is discipline for which father will not discipline his own children?
- b) We have free will.
 - i. We have a responsibility to be like Christ as we are called to (2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Peter 1:17, Romans 12:1).
 - ii. We will be judged for our works (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- c) God through our free will is able to make all things work towards His plans and purposes (Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 40:23, 2 Chronicles 20:6, Proverbs 15:9).
- d) The Mystery of Providence (Job 11:7).

There will be situations of which we cannot explain as we can never understand the workings of the spiritual realm. Though we do not understand, we can still believe that God is good and sovereign.

Let us not be passive in our Christian living. Live the faith-filled life without the wrong understanding of God. Do not blame everything on God; it is not God's will for us to go through bad days. Use our spiritual authority and pray! Secondly, rest in His love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. God loves us simply for who we are. At the end of the day, God's will be done and you will experience the love of God (Romans 6:28-39).

Discussion Questions

1. **What comes to mind when you hear the phrase that "God is sovereign"?** [5 min]

Leader's Notes: A warm-up question. Get members to share briefly and their responses can reflect their understanding of God and their faith in Him. This question is merely to provide an opportunity to hear them articulate what it means at a personal level, that God is sovereign in their lives.

2. **Daniel 4 tells about the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar. What can you say about God's character in the way He dealt with the king?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: It helps if the facilitator can read Daniel 4 before the discussion and give a short summary using this scope:

Daniel 4:23-26 > What is the message for the king?

Daniel 4:27 > What did Daniel advise the king to do?

Daniel 4:30 > What did the king say of himself?

Daniel 4:34-35 > What did the king say of 'the Most High'?

We know that the King attributed his power and success to himself and he did not see that all he has achieved goes to show God's sovereignty over kings and kingdoms (verse 30). His arrogance was his downfall. God's character: 1) The prophecy about what would happen to the King for '7 periods of time' came true (verse 23) with certainty despite being given 12 months before it happened. This shows the **goodness and mercy** of God to the gentile king. 2) From verse 27, Daniel gave king Nebuchadnezzar the

advice 'to break away from sins by doing righteousness and from iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.' This shows the **grace** of God since He was given a route of 'escape' from judgment if he were to repent there and then. 3) God's foreknowledge over mankind is prominent as the angelic watcher told the king of what might befall the 'stump' in the dream (verse 23). God is **all-knowing** but the king's free will has an important part to play to avert his own judgment.

God has delivered to the king a message forewarning him of his downfall due to pride. The king had however not heeded the advice of Daniel. He made a choice and had to bear with the results (or consequences) of not choosing God's godly warning aka the dream through Daniel. The good news was that even for a non-Jew, God kept His promise. He restored the king upon his repentance. It took the king to go through 'bad days' to acknowledge God as 'the Most High' (Daniel 4:37).

3. **Pastor Ernie mentioned evil does not originate from God by using Job as an example. However, why did God 'allow' misfortune to befall him (Job 2:1-6)?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: A relate question. Pastor said that evil does not originate from God & then we can only conclude that evil has to come from the devil. In essence, we must see the purpose and theme of the book of Job. He was a 'blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil' and he never faltered holding fast his integrity although Satan incited God against him to ruin him without cause' and God's hand was on Job (Job 2:3). Therefore, he has done nothing to suffer from this misfortune. However why did God suggest that Job be put in the devil's 'power' but only to spare his life (Job 2:6)? God is sovereign and all-knowing. Although He could have spared the pain people go through, it is left to both the free will of man and its consequences and the sovereignty of God that our finite mind can only conclude with. Whatever is discussed, we need to acknowledge that providence itself is mysterious and there is much we do not understand but that is also the profound meaning of faith itself.

4. **How would we know if we are passive in the way we live our Christian life? How can we get rid of these which affect our faith to grow?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: A reflect & response question. What might traces of passivity in our Christian life look like? A passive life may also mean having a 'complacent' or 'depressed' outlook towards life. This is unhealthy as it will lead to having no intrinsic desire to do any better with the gifts and talents that we have been given by God. Get members to list some examples of believers having a passive approach towards their faith (for eg., wrong understanding of God's character, a 'works' mentality to earn God's favour, giving excuses to start serving in ministry, refusal to reconcile differences, etc..) and suggest practical ways to walk out of passivity.

For those who are going through a challenging faith season, we can come alongside to pray, to journey with them for a period. Taking our position as sons and daughters with spiritual authority and with the Holy Spirit's help - to stand firm in our faith against the evil one and sin. It is our choice to trust God in spite of the challenges. Take time to pray for one another.

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. We will constantly live the faith-filled life, having the correct understanding of God. Using our spiritual authority and pray, fully rest in His love.

Announcements**1. Building Prayer Alters Rekindling the Holy Fire****Speaker: Pastor Julius Suubi**

Fri - Sat, 10 - 11 Mar | 9am - 4.30pm | RiverLife Church

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 5 Mar.