TRACK FOUR

THE WRITING ON THE WALL · COMPANION GUIDE

# Bible Study & Small Group

*A complete session for small groups, classes, and Bible studies, with leader preparation and notes. Plan on 45 to 60 minutes.*

## Leader Preparation

### THE BIG IDEA

God weighs every heart. Belshazzar knew the truth about God but refused to humble himself. Yet God gives grace to the humble, and while we have breath, there is time to turn to Him.

> *"You, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, ... and you have not glorified the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways."*
>
> DANIEL 5:22-23, WEB

### BACKGROUND

- **Setting.** Babylon's last night as an imperial capital, which historians date to October 539 BC.
- **The king.** Babylonian records show Belshazzar ruling in Babylon for his father, King Nabonidus. That likely explains why he could offer only the *third* place in the kingdom (5:7, 16, 29).
- **The cups.** The vessels had been taken from God's temple in Jerusalem (Daniel 1:2; 5:2-3).
- **Daniel.** He had been in Babylon about 66 years, so he was likely in his eighties *(an estimate; the Bible gives no age)*.
- **The story he knew.** Daniel 4: God humbled Nebuchadnezzar and restored him.

### SESSION PLAN

| | 45 MIN | 60 MIN |
|---|---|---|
| Welcome and opener | 5 | 8 |
| Watch the film | 11 | 11 |
| Read Daniel 5:17-31 | 5 | 5 |
| Discussion (choose 4-5) | 16 | 24 |
| Application and prayer | 8 | 12 |

### BEFORE YOU MEET

Read Daniel 4 and 5. Chapter 5 depends on chapter 4. Watch the film; the king's death is not shown on screen. Read the leader notes on page 3.

## The Session

1. **Open.** Have you ever known exactly what you *should* do and still not done it? What got in the way?
2. **Watch.** Play *The Writing on the Wall* (youtu.be/dwrmPL33TgM, about 10 minutes). Ask the group to notice what Belshazzar already knew about God.
3. **Read.** Read Daniel 5:17-31 aloud together.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What image or moment from the film stayed with you?
2. Belshazzar used holy things for a party and praised idols with them (5:2-4). What does this teach us about approaching God with reverence today?
3. The king had power, wealth, and wise men, yet none of it could help him (5:6-9). Why not?
4. Daniel turned down the gifts but still told the truth (5:17). What can we learn from the way he spoke to a powerful man?
5. Daniel said, "you knew all this" (5:22). Why is knowing about God not the same as humbling ourselves before Him?
6. "...the God in whose hand your breath is..." (5:23). How would living with that truth change an ordinary day?
7. Read 5:27, Proverbs 21:2, and 1 Samuel 16:7. What do these passages show about what God sees in people?
8. Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and was restored (4:34-37). Belshazzar did not. What does this tell us about God's heart toward the humble (James 4:6)?

## APPLICATION

- **Be honest.** Is there pride you already know about, as Belshazzar did, that you have not laid down?
- **Turn today.** Don't wait for a hand on the wall. Take one step of humility this week: confess, apologize, give thanks, or ask for help.
- **Remember the breath.** Each morning this week, before you check your phone, thank God for the breath in your lungs (5:23).

## PRAYER

Begin with a minute of silence so each person can bring any pride before God. Then thank Him that He gives grace to the humble, and that in Jesus no one who turns to Him is turned away (John 6:37).

# Leader Notes on the Questions

**Q2, THE VESSELS.** Their history spans the whole exile. Nebuchadnezzar took them (Daniel 1:2; 2 Chronicles 36:7), Belshazzar profaned them, and later Cyrus sent them back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7-11). God kept track of His temple's cups through it all.

**Q3, WHY THE KING WAS HELPLESS.** Belshazzar's "wise men" were Babylon's experts in signs and omens, but the writing came from the God they did not know. Compare Daniel 2:27-28, where Daniel says only "a God in heaven who reveals secrets" can do this.

**Q5, KNOWING AND HUMBLING.** This is the heart of the chapter. Belshazzar's sin wasn't ignorance (5:22). Compare James 2:19 and Luke 12:47-48. Greater knowledge brings greater responsibility.

**Q8, THE CONTRAST.** Daniel 4 ends with a proud king lifting his eyes to heaven and being restored (4:34-37). Daniel 5 ends with a proud king who would not and was slain. The point isn't that God is harsh, but that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.

**IF SOMEONE ASKS, "DID BELSHAZZAR HAVE A CHANCE TO REPENT?"** The text doesn't say whether he could have been spared that night, and it's wise not to speculate. What the text does stress is that he had known the truth for a long time (5:22). For us, Scripture says "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

**SENSITIVE CONTENT.** The chapter includes drinking and a death. For mixed-age groups, keep the focus on pride and humility.