TRACK THREE

THE WRITING ON THE WALL · COMPANION GUIDE

YOUTH MINISTRY

A 60-75 minute youth night for middle and high school students: a hook, a talk, discussion, breakouts, and a challenge for the week.

THE BIG IDEA

Knowing about God is not the same as humbling your heart before Him, and God weighs the heart, not the highlight reel.

NIGHT PLAN

	60 MIN	75 MIN
Arrival and hook	9	11
Watch the film	10	10
Leader talk	15	18
Large-group discussion	8	10
Small-group breakouts	12	16
Reflection	4	6
Challenge and prayer	2	4

THE HOOK: GUESS THE WEIGHT

Bring a kitchen or luggage scale and five objects. Include things that *look* heavy but aren't (a big pillow, an inflated beach ball) and things that are heavier than they look (a hardback book, a full water bottle). Students rank the objects by weight, then you weigh each one. Ask: *What surprised you when we checked the real weights?*

Low-prep option: *Highlight vs. Real.* Students share one thing that looks great online but is very different in real life, like the perfect meal photo, the vacation, or the game-day pic.

LEADER TALK

1 **THE FLEX.** Belshazzar threw a party for "a thousand of his lords" (5:1). It was a show of power, wealth, and image. Then he called for the sacred cups from God's temple, not to honor God but as props for his own glory (5:2-4). Ask: *What do we use to make ourselves look big?* Followers, brands, grades, sports, even faith itself, when we wear it like a costume.

2 **"...THOUGH YOU KNEW ALL THIS..."** Read 5:22. The most sobering line in the chapter isn't the writing on the wall. It's Daniel's verdict. Belshazzar knew how God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar, and he ignored it. Many of us have heard the Bible stories for years. Familiarity can make us numb. Information is not transformation.

3 **WEIGHED.** "…you are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting." (5:27) The crowd weighs your image. God weighs your heart: "man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). That's a warning, and it's also freedom. You don't have to perform for Him.

4 **PRIDE HAS CONSEQUENCES.** "Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) Pride says *I don't need anyone, including God.* It shows up in how we treat parents, teachers, teammates, and people online. Choices pile up, and so do consequences.

5 **TWO KINGS, TWO ENDINGS.** Nebuchadnezzar was proud too, but he humbled himself and was restored (4:34-37). Belshazzar refused. The difference wasn't how bad they were; it was whether they humbled their hearts. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

6 **THE ONE WHO STANDS IN OUR PLACE.** On our own, every one of us comes up short (Romans 3:23). The good news of the gospel, not a prediction in Daniel 5, is that Jesus stood in our place: “For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) Humility simply means coming to Him with empty hands.

DISCUSSION

MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. What did Belshazzar do that showed he didn't respect God?
2. The Bible doesn't say whether anyone challenged the king. What makes it hard to speak up when someone powerful does wrong?
3. What does pride look like in middle school? What does humility look like?
4. What's one way someone has shown you humility?

HIGH SCHOOL

1. Why is it possible to know a lot about God and still not be changed?
2. Where does our culture reward the “highlight reel” over character?
3. Daniel turned down the king's gifts (5:17) and told him a hard truth respectfully. When is telling the truth worth the cost?
4. What's the difference between feeling bad about being caught and real humility?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. Which choices this week showed humility? Where would you like God's help to respond differently next time?
2. Which is harder for you: admitting you're wrong, asking for help, or letting someone else get the credit?
3. What story about God do you *know* but haven't really let change you?
4. What's one humble step you'll take this week?

REFLECTION: TWO OPTIONS

Phones down. Hand each student an index card with a line down the middle, labeled *Image* and *Heart*. On the left, they write what they work hardest to look like. On the right, they write what they want God to find. Have them keep the card.

Phones out (no social media). Have students open their notes app and make two short lists, *Image* (what I work hardest to look like) and *Heart* (what I want God to find). Then they write one honest sentence to God, starting with *Search me…* (see Psalm 139:23-24).

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

ONE HUMBLE STEP A DAY.

Each day this week: own a mistake, ask for help, or make sure someone else gets the credit. Next time your small group meets, share which one was hardest, if you want to. Anyone may pass.

LEADER NOTES ON HARD QUESTIONS

"WAS IT FAIR THAT HE DIED THAT SAME NIGHT?" The text stresses that Belshazzar knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar (5:22), and he chose to mock God openly. It doesn't tell us how many chances he had to repent. Scripture shows God as patient, "not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Scripture often shows God's patience before His judgment. Remind students that this is a story about a king and an empire facing judgment, not a picture of how God treats a teenager who messes up.

"WHY DOES GOD LET PROUD OR EVIL PEOPLE GET AWAY WITH IT?" Sometimes it looks that way for a long time. Daniel 5 says they don't get away with it forever. God's patience is meant to lead people to repentance (Romans 2:4), and His justice is certain.

"IS DRINKING A SIN?" Christians hold different views on alcohol, and you should follow your church's teaching. All agree that Scripture warns against drunkenness: "Don't be drunken with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit…" (Ephesians 5:18). Laws about minors and alcohol differ by place; follow local law and your church's policies, and never pressure students to talk about their own or their family's drinking. Keep the focus of the night on pride.

"DID THIS REALLY HAPPEN?" Belshazzar was once unknown outside the Bible. Babylonian texts later showed that he was Nabonidus' son and ruled in Babylon in his father's place, which fits his offer of "third ruler" (5:16). Babylon fell to Cyrus' forces in 539 BC. The writing on the wall itself is not recorded outside Scripture. See the Deep Dive track, for the details and sources.

SAFEGUARDING. If a child or teen tells you about abuse, neglect, self-harm, harmful drinking or drug use at home, or anything else that makes you worried for their safety: stay calm, listen, and thank them for telling you. Don't promise to keep it secret, don't question them for details or investigate, and don't confront anyone involved. Write down what they said as soon as you can, and report it the same day to your church's designated safeguarding lead, following your church's safeguarding policy and any mandatory-reporting law that applies to you. If anyone is in immediate danger, stay with them and call emergency services. Telling a church safeguarding lead does not replace any report the law requires you to make directly to child-protection authorities or police.

PRAYER

Give students a moment of silence to pray Psalm 139:23: "Search me, God, and know my heart." Then close: *Lord, You see past every image we build. Forgive our pride. Thank You that Jesus was found faithful in our place. Make us humble, honest, and grateful. Amen.*