



# REVERSE

Live Differently

4 Week Youth Group Curriculum Leader's Guide // Greg Stier



## A Word to Youth Leaders

Daniel lived for God in a world that pushed, prodded and penalized him for his faith in the one, true God. Yet he chose to live in “reverse”—totally differently from the world around him. This kind of God-focused, different way of living is deep, intense, exciting, risky and immensely satisfying, because it keeps us in tune with the way God designed us to live—in relationship with Him.

While still teenagers, Daniel and his friends exhibited immense courage as they were swept up in the ravages of war. Despite their trials and troubles—or perhaps because of them—they were totally tuned into the one, true God they loved, trusted and served. Because of their God-focus, they related, thought and acted differently than the world around them, so that they shone like stars in the midst of darkness. They changed the course of history across kingdoms and centuries.

We can learn a lot from Daniel about how to live for God, no matter what comes our way.

And that’s what *Reverse: Live Differently* is designed to do: help you and your students unpack timeless truths from the book of Daniel about how to live with a God-focus in a me-focused world.

May God bless you as you help your teenagers explore how to live in reverse!

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## How to Use this Curriculum

This Leader's Guide and corresponding 21 days of student devotional handouts drill down into a few specific passages in Daniel. The youth group lessons and devo readings work in tandem to help your students develop a deeper, richer relationship with God and better understand His call on their lives to join Him in the most important job on the planet—bringing His hope and truth to their world.

Your group lesson time will introduce each Bible passage. Then, the daily student devotional readings during the subsequent week will drill down even deeper into the same passage. The devo content and activities strive to make the Biblical truths of the passage more personally applicable to each student.

The weekly themes and Bible passages break out like this:

Week 1: **Relate Differently.** Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream (Daniel 2)

Week 2: **Think Differently.** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3)

Week 3: **Act Differently.** Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6)

Week 4: **Shine Differently.** Caps off the Daniel series (Daniel 12:1b-3)

The curriculum provides fully developed lessons. You'll find step-by-step directions, icebreaker activities, discussion questions, prayers, Scripture, gospel presentations and more in your Leader's Guide.

If your discussion times go well, there may be more content in these lessons than your group has time for, so feel free to pick and choose what to cover and what to cut. If your group is hesitant to participate in the discussion time, ask your question and wait patiently for your students to engage. Waiting creates tension, and tension is a tool for change. You know your students best, so customize your use of the materials to your own situation. The detailed lessons are simply a plan that you can modify as needed. (User Note: The words in bold provide a sample script to help you, while the non-bolded words provide logistical directions for you.)

Each lesson includes a segue to a clear gospel presentation. Don't assume that all your students have previously understood or embraced the message of the gospel. And follow up with those who make a decision to trust in Christ. Get them grounded and growing in their new faith. For help with this, check out Dare 2 Share Now Grow! discipling curriculum.



# WEEK 1: RELATE DIFFERENTLY

## Key Idea

God used Daniel to reveal His mysteries and message to King Nebuchadnezzar. God has placed you in your own circle of influence to reveal God's mysteries, too—the mystery of the cross.

## Key Scripture

Daniel 2:28; Colossians 1:25-29

## Supplies

- *Reverse: Live Differently* devo Week 1 handouts for each student
- Bibles
- Cloth or towel for "swami" headgear
- Optional: Projection equipment and the movie *Inception* cued up to time codes noted

## Explain

This week we're launching into a new 4-week series called *Reverse*. It's about learning to live differently from the world around us—about living in "reverse," so to speak—with a God-centered focus, instead of a me-centered focus. We'll be exploring a few key stories from the book of Daniel in the Bible to help us explore living in reverse.

But let's start with a little fun.

## Reconnect: Icebreaker

### Explain

Dreams intrigue us. So much so, that there have been lots of movies made that are about dreams.

### Ask

- Can anyone think of some movies that are about dreams? I'm talking now about the sleeping type of dreams, not the "American dream" or "the good life" type of dream.

### Explain

Some are fun, like *Alice in Wonderland* and *Dumbo*, and some are weirder, like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Shutter Island*. Optional: Let's take a look at one of the more creative, intriguing movies about the world of dreams, *Inception*.

Optional: Show clip from *Inception* [Scene 3: Time code 27:00 through 28:20] as intro to the following dream activities.

### Pair Share Questions

- What's the weirdest dream you've ever had? Share with your neighbor the weirdest dream that comes to mind.
- I'm looking for a few people who might be willing to come up front and share their weirdest dream with the rest of the group. Of course, keep in mind that this needs to be a PG rated dream, if you're going to share it. Any volunteers?

### Up Front Activity

Arrange in advance for someone (this could be you, another adult leader or a student) to pretend like they are an "interpreter of dreams." Make this a humorous activity by donning a cloth or towel as swami headgear, and as students share their weird dreams, analyze them with nonsensical lines like...

- "Ah...that means you like chocolate chip cookies and are afraid of cats."
- "I see that you are obsessed with *Star Trek* and hope to be an astronaut."
- "I'm thinking that you have a phobia of closets and have trouble sitting still in class."
- "It appears you long for harmony and order whenever you open your locker at school."
- "I see you want to travel the world and that you love string cheese."
- "That means you want to compete in *The Amazing Race* and that you struggle with a compulsive addiction to crossword puzzles."

### Transition

In many respects, dreams are a mystery to us. Sure, sometimes we see connections with real life, but despite the best efforts of things like "dream science" and such, sometimes dreams are just mysterious. That's true today, and that was true back in the time that Daniel, our Bible character, lived. It's a mysterious dream that lies at the center of the story about Daniel that we're going to be talking about today. The incident is described in Daniel 2. But before we jump in further, let's pray.



## Rekindle: Opening Prayer

Dear God, thank You for this opportunity to have fun and learn more about You as we take a deeper look at Daniel 2. Help us become God-focused people in a me-focused world. In Jesus' name, amen.



## Rethink: Bible Study

### Ask

- So tell me, off the top of your head, what are some of the stories about Daniel that you're familiar with?
- For many of us who grew up in the church, as little kids we heard some of these stories over and over—they are very familiar. Why do you think the story of Daniel and the lions is such a staple in little kids' Sunday school?

### Explain

Well, we're going to be digging deeper than the typical little kid Sunday school approach to Daniel—because Daniel is an amazingly rich book for insights on how to live a God-focused life in the midst of tough stuff.

Daniel and his friends lived in a world that pushed, prodded and penalized them for their faith in the one, true God. But these young men didn't plunk themselves down for a big pity party. Instead, they demonstrated grit, courage, faith and savvy. They didn't let their difficulties and trials push them away from God. Incredibly, their trials and challenges pushed them closer to God.

How is that even possible? That's what we're going to be unpacking in this series.

So here we go. The book of Daniel is actually a mix of Daniel's personal story, his prophecies and his interpretations of dreams foretelling some significant pieces of God's unfolding plan across the sweep of history.

As you might infer from our opening dream activity, today's topic has to do with a mysterious dream Daniel interprets for King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. But the theme we're focusing in on for our lesson today isn't so much the dream itself, but the fact that God used a young man in a difficult, pressure-filled, traumatic situation to communicate the mysteries of God's divine plan and purposes to others.

But first, a little back story about Daniel and his situation.

It's 605 B.C. There's a big battle for Jerusalem. The Babylonians are attacking the Jews. You get the picture. Lots of gore and death. And it's bad news for the Jews: they lose. Jerusalem falls to the invaders. So the Jews are taken as captives and marched off to Babylon, 500 miles away. Daniel and three of his friends are among these captives. Most Bible scholars believe that Daniel and his friends were still teenagers at the time they were taken into captivity.



Once in Babylon, these four young friends are selected as the cream of the crop and conscripted for indoctrination and training in King Nebuchadnezzar's elite school of "wise men," made up of "astrologers, enchanters, magicians and sorcerers." These wise men's job description included interpreting the king's dreams using their "dark arts."

So, all of this back story brings us to an intense incident in Daniel 2.

### Ask

- Can I have a volunteer read Daniel 2:1-7 for us?
- So who are the key players here? [Remember that Daniel and his friends are lumped in among the "wise men" in this story.]
- What's the king's threat?
- What's the reward?
- Now let's jump down the passage a bit. Can I have a volunteer read Daniel 2:10-13?

### Explain

All the king's "wise men" have been sentenced to death because none of them can mind-read and interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's weird, disturbing dream—including Daniel & Co.

### Pair Share Question

- So imagine yourself in Daniel's situation, faced with a death sentence. How would you be feeling about now? Here's a list of possible responses. Pick the one that best describes how you would be feeling: victimized, outraged, hopeless, stressed, scared, God-focused, desperate, analytical? Which of these words best describes your emotional response to hearing that your head was on the chopping block for under-performing on your job? Why do you think that?

Gather your students' attention back to the large group.

### Ask

- Well, let's see how Daniel responded. Can I have a volunteer read Daniel 2:14-19 for us?
- What do you think? Is Daniel one of those dudes who is cool in a crisis?
- Is this crisis in any way his fault?
- Did he see it coming?
- Let's look closely, what action steps do we see Daniel taking here? [i.e., 1. Wisely and tactfully gathers info from an informed source; 2. Negotiates a one night "stay of execution"; 3. Goes to his friends and enlists them to pray; 4. Seeks an answer from God during the night; 5. Gets an answer; 6. Praises God!]
- Why do you think Daniel is able to remain cool in this crisis? Is there an underlying "something" in his perspective on life that helps him stay cool and collected? What might that be? [His close relationship with God and unflinching trust in Him—his God-focus.]
- So let's pick it up a bit later in the story. Can I have a volunteer read Daniel 2:24-28?