



REVERSE

Live Differently

STUDENT DEVOTIONALS

Greg Stier



DARE 2 SHARE PREVIEW

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WEEK 1



Reverse Living:
Intense, Deep, Vibrant,
Risky, Rewarding, Immense

Just look at the world around you and at the secret interior life inside you and you'll see it's true: life can get intense. Relationally intense, in terms of how you interact with others. Inside-your-head intense as you think about and process things. How-to-live-your-life intense when it comes to your choices and actions.

But in the midst of the intensity of life, God has plans for you. In fact, He has BIG plans for you—He longs for a deep, rich, vibrant relationship between you and Him, and He is calling you to the most important job on the planet, bringing His hope and truth to those around you.

In a nutshell, you could summarize His desires for you like this: To know Him and make Him known.

God's desires for you as His follower stand in dramatic opposition to how the world around you is living life. Our world is largely me-focused, rather than God-focused. That's why I call living with a God-focus living in "reverse." It's a totally different way to live—deep, wild, intense, exciting, risky and immensely satisfying—because it's living in tune with the way God designed us to live, in relationship with Him.

We see this kind of reverse living on full display in one of my favorite Old Testament books of the Bible: Daniel. Daniel and his friends were totally tuned into the one, true God they loved, trusted and served. And because of that God-focus, they related differently, thought differently and acted differently than the world around them. While still teenagers, they exhibited immense courage as they were swept up in the ravages of war. And as they continued to keep their focus on God, they lived godly lives of excellence and integrity; lives that changed the course of history across kingdoms and centuries.

In these next three weeks of daily devos, we'll be looking at three themes from three compelling, courageous stories out of the book of Daniel.

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)

Each of these stories gives us a brutally honest window into what bravely living in reverse looked like for Daniel & Co. as they sought to know God and make Him known, facing down extreme danger and persecution while their very lives hung in the balance.

But these three stories are more than interesting, entertaining reading. They provide amazingly powerful, relevant insights for you as you seek to live in reverse today in the very place God has planted you—in the midst of the good, the bad and the ugly intensity of life right now.

Of course, living in reverse will look distinctly different in each person's life. How you personally live it out will be as unique as your fingerprints, your personality, your passions and your circumstances. That's why this devo is packed full of opportunities for you to apply what you're learning personally, day by day. Here's a quick roadmap of how the typical devo is structured:

Read – Identifies the Bible passage for the day.

Recharge – Provides some context and a brief recap of the Bible passage.

Reflect – Unpacks how the timeless truth found in the passage is relevant to you personally.

Reverse – Presents a concrete, personal application that challenges you to live in reverse.

Remember – Recommends a tool or tip to help you share Jesus' message with others.

Renew – Provides a guided prayer as you seek God's help in applying what you've learned (if the devo for the day doesn't already include a prayer time).

As you explore these three stories in the book of Daniel, you'll discover some invaluable, timeless truths. Let them ignite your walk with God and transform you into a Jesus follower who, like Daniel, can rock your world and change the course of history for all eternity!

#1 DANIEL: GOD'S MAN WITH A MISSION

Recharge

Besieged, beaten and destined for bondage. Daniel found himself swept up in a defeat of catastrophic proportions. Along with many of his Jewish countrymen, he was taken captive by the conquering Babylonian army in 605 B.C, while he was still a teenager.

Sucked into the upheaval of war, and hauled off to Babylon to become a servant to his new master, King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel could have easily seen himself as just a young, helpless pawn in a power struggle between nations. But Daniel refused to wallow in distress and despair. The trials he faced were not a wedge that drove him away from God; instead, the Book of Daniel gives us a striking look into how his trials served as a wedge that pushed him even closer to God.

Daniel put his trust in the Almighty God who had uprooted him from his old life and transplanted him to a new one. He displayed an unshakeable confidence that God was large and in charge. He was

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a young man with a mission and a message: to know God and make Him known.

The Book of Daniel is a mix of Daniel's personal story and his prophecies foretelling some critical aspects of God's unfolding plan across the sweep of history. Daniel's personal story is packed with exciting, dramatic incidents—like Daniel in the lion's den, and his three friends' heated encounter with a fiery furnace. But his prophecies are equally exciting and dramatic. They predicted four of the coming earthly kingdoms whose rise and fall would directly impact the nation of Israel, and also describe the coming eternal, heavenly kingdom to be established by Jesus the Messiah.

Reflect

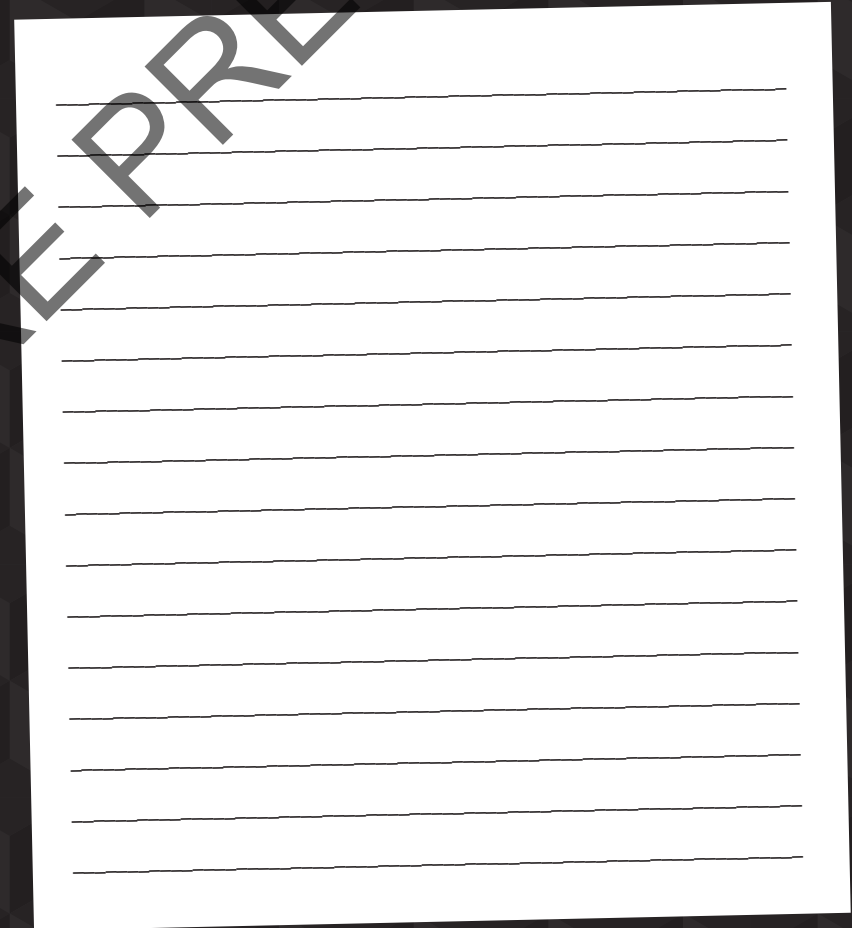
The Bible tells us that life works best when it's lived out of a deep, intimate relationship with God. A give-and-take relationship that's so vibrant and powerful that it will carry you through thick and thin. God wants this kind of relationship with you so He can meet you in the midst of both the joy and the pain—no matter what. Even when life seems unfair or grows uncomfortable, He will walk beside you through it all as you connect with Him at that deep, personal level. He did that for Daniel, and He'll do it for you.

And you have something else in common with Daniel. No matter who you are or where you live, God has a mission and message for you too: to know Him and make Him known. Now it's time to unpack some of what that looks like...

Reverse

Right now, in the midst of whatever's going on in your life—good, bad or ugly, does God feel distant or close to you? Take a few minutes to write a note to God about how you're feeling. Then ask Him to help you go deeper with Him in the coming days.

DEAR GOD,
LATELY I'VE BEEN FEELING LIKE YOU AND I ARE...

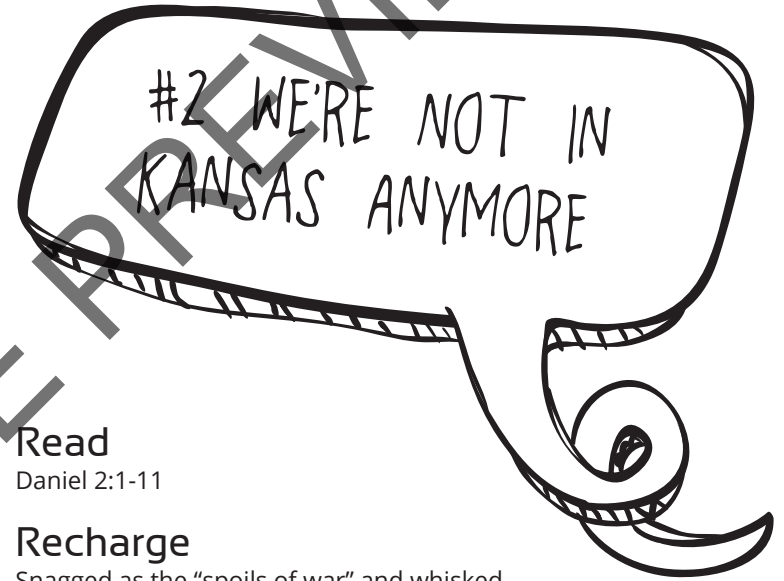
A white rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing a letter to God. The lines are evenly spaced and cover the entire width of the area. A large, diagonal watermark reading "DANIEL'S SHARED JOURNALS" is overlaid on the page, partially covering the writing area.

Remember

Everyone is going through stuff. Think about a non-Christian friend who is stressed or struggling right now. Pray that you can find a way to encourage them today.

Renew

Father, I pray that in the days ahead You will help me learn how to connect with You on a deeper, more intimate level. I want a relationship with You that will carry me through good times and bad. Show me what living in reverse looks like for me, and give me the courage to live differently. In Jesus' name, amen.



Read

Daniel 2:1-11

Recharge

Snagged as the “spoils of war” and whisked away to Babylon’s foreign culture, Daniel and some of the other smart, physically fit Hebrew teenagers were pulled aside for special treatment. For three years the King’s court officials immersed these promising young men in a new way of thinking and trained them for the position of “wise men” in the royal court.

Daniel and his friends found themselves transported from their devout Hebrew roots into a swirling marketplace of spiritual ideas. They routinely rubbed shoulders with the king’s other “wise men”—



described as “astrologers, enchanters, magicians and sorcerers”— whose jobs included interpreting the king’s dreams using their “dark arts.”

Now, their “dark arts” were failing to deliver what the king demanded: an explanation for his troubling dream. Their false, empty promises were being uncloaked as the spiritual imposters they’d been all along.

Reflect

Can you relate to Daniel’s situation? While you probably don’t have “astrologers, enchanters, magicians and sorcerers” sitting across the aisle from you in class, you do face a swirling marketplace of spiritual influences and worldviews. YouTube, music, movies, porn, friends, enemies, TV, parties...you’re surrounded by a wide range of cultural inputs trying to influence you in ways that pull you away from God. You’re bombarded by mind-shifting messages about things like beauty, stuff, success and sex.

It can be a real struggle to keep your focus on God in the midst of all of this.

Reverse

How are you doing at discerning God’s truth and exposing the false, empty promises clamoring for your soul? Ask God to help you hear His voice of truth, as you dive deep into His Word. Take a few minutes and jot down some thoughts about how you’re doing. Here are a couple areas to consider...

APPEARANCE

The culture tells me I’m more valuable if I’m attractive and have cool clothes. But God, you tell me, *“Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God”* (1 Peter 3:3-4).

STUFF

The culture tells me to want more toys, more tech, more money, more stuff. But Jesus, you tell me, *“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be”* (Matthew 6:21).

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Remember

Do you have friends who are trapped in the emptiness of a life lived apart from God's truth? Start praying for them. Ask God to begin working in their hearts and lives to prepare them to hear Jesus' message of hope and truth.

Renew

Father, help me hear Your truth from Your Word and stay focused on You. Expose the false, empty promises the world around me tries to get me to buy into. In Jesus' name, amen.

#3 COOL
IN A CRISIS



Read

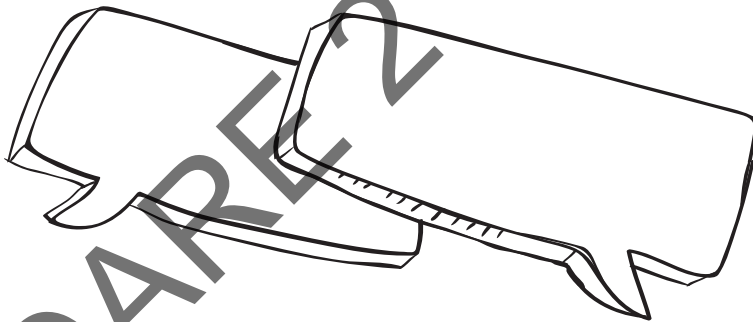
Daniel 2:12-19

Recharge

They were all going to die!

The king was so outraged by his wise men's failure to interpret his troubling dream, that he issued a blanket death sentence for all of them—including Daniel and his three friends. But even in a deadly crisis, Daniel kept his wits about him. He was not thrown into panic or despair.

Not at all. Daniel's faith in God kept hope alive. Instead of fruitless protest or effusive excuses, Daniel asked the relevant questions that would give him a pulse on the full situation, then quickly became a young man with a plan, intent on rescuing all of them from death.



Daniel approached the king and asked for more time, exuding a confidence that the dream could be interpreted—a confidence born out of his steadfast faith that his God was large and in charge. Then, once the king's temporary stay of execution was secured, Daniel laid the critical groundwork every crisis calls for: PRAYER. He immediately enlisted his three Hebrew friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, to pray and plead for God's mercy concerning the king's mysterious dream. (FYI, the Babylonians changed these guys' names to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.)

And during the night, their prayers were answered. God revealed the king's dream to Daniel in a vision.

Reflect

How about you? When the going gets tough, is your first instinct to run away, when instead you should lean on God and enlist your Christian friends to rally round you with prayer and encouragement?

While you might not be facing down a literal life-and-death situation like Daniel was, all of us confront tough stuff in our lives: broken relationships, painful rejections, stress, family conflicts, the loss of a loved one and shattered dreams, to name a few.

When you find yourself facing discouragement or distress, don't run, and don't try to stand alone. Develop a plan for dealing with it, rally some friends and lean in to these three incredible resources: your faith in God, prayer and your Christian friends. Here are some truths from God's Word that you can cling to:

"So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done (Philippians 4:6).

If you've never experienced the kind of loving, personal relationship with God described in the passages above, I invite you to enter into that kind of relationship now by trusting in Jesus for your salvation. Check out the GOSPEL box at the end of today's devo entry to learn about this free gift of grace.

Reverse

Is there some stressor that's causing discouragement or difficulty in your life, or in the life of someone you care about? Start praying about it today. Ask a few friends to begin praying with you. Seek advice from godly Christians you respect (both peers and adults) so they can help you maneuver your way through the tough stuff.

Remember

Daniel developed a plan to rescue himself and his friends. Go to www.dare2share.org/thecause/the-cause-circle/ for a simple tool to help you become more purposeful in your efforts to reach and rescue your friends who need Jesus.

Renew

Dear God, thank You that I can run to You when things get tough. Thank You that You always understand me and that I can bring all my requests and concerns to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

THE GOSPEL

The word gospel means “good news,” and is explained by the following six key truths.

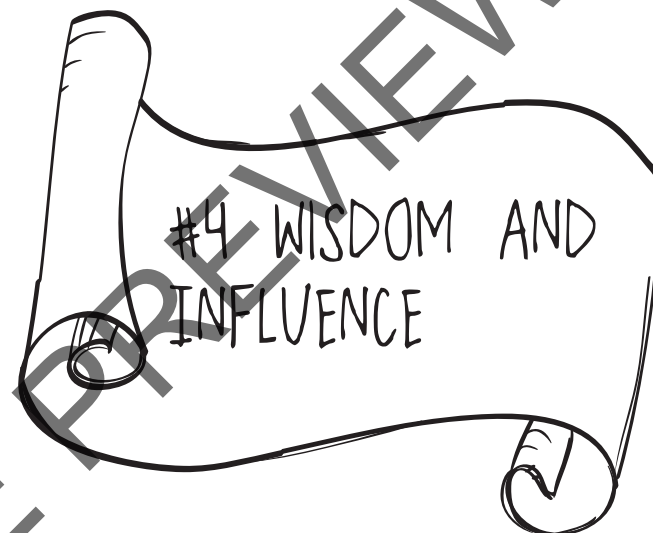
- G**od created us to be with Him. (Genesis 1-2)
- O**ur sins separate us from God. (Genesis 3)
- S**ins cannot be removed by good deeds. (Genesis 4 – Malachi 4)
- P**aying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again. (Matthew – Luke)
- E**veryone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life. (John)
- L**ife with Jesus starts now and lasts forever. (Acts - Revelation)

Is there anything holding you back from putting your faith in Jesus right now to give you eternal life? The moment you trust in Jesus, you enter into an eternal relationship with God. Your life will never be the same. Both now and forever.

While saying a prayer isn't what gets you into a relationship with God, it is a way for you to express your newfound faith in Jesus. You might pray something like this...

“Dear God, I know that my sins have broken my relationship with You, and that nothing I could do could ever change that. But right now, I believe that Jesus died in my place and rose again from the dead. I trust in Him to forgive me for my sins. Through faith in Him, I am entering an eternal relationship with You. Thank You for this free gift! Amen.”

For more information, go to www.LifeIn6Words.com.



Read

Daniel 2: 20-23

Recharge

Daniel knew without a doubt that God was the source of the wisdom he'd received to interpret the king's dream, and the giver of the influential position he had at the king's court. You hear it clearly in this line of Daniel's prayer: *"I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you"* (Daniel 2:23. NIV).

But something even bigger was about to happen here. Not only was God supernaturally intervening to save these doomed young men's lives, He was also bringing together the pieces of the puzzle that was Daniel's life. The tragic, traumatic twists and turns of being a captive of the Babylonians were being redeemed through God's unfolding larger plan and purpose.