

My name is Shan and I'd like to welcome those of you on each of our campuses and online to our worship services today.

It is an honor to be able to serve on staff here at the Creek, but for different reasons people sometimes leave our staff. We have a tradition that when someone leaves, we give them a cake with a heartfelt message on it. Let me share just a few examples. (Please view the video recording of this sermon to see these images.)

Now, I hope you can tell that these cakes are all in fun. This tradition is a humorous way that we keep each other humble and keep pride under control.

As we continue through the book of Daniel, today we are going to talk about pride and its cousin, success. Last week Dan took us through chapter three and the fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego wouldn't bend in their beliefs, they wouldn't bow to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, and they didn't burn in the fire as God saved them.

If it's ok with you, I'm just going to call him King Nebby from now on—it will cut the message down by 10 minutes if I don't have to say his whole name.

This leads King Nebby to say:

“Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.” (Daniel 3:28-29)

It “sounds” like Nebby has figured out that there is just one true God, but once again he strays. Chapter four is different from the previous three chapters because now we start hearing the story from King Nebby's point of view.

The heading for this chapter in my Bible is “Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Tree.” I prefer two titles, like the old *Rocky and Bullwinkle* cartoon series where every episode had two titles. I title this chapter, “Nebuchadnezzar and the Tree of Doom! or, the Test of Success.” These more exciting titles really tell the story.

Chapter four picks up well into Nebby's leadership as the most powerful man on earth at the time. One night he has a dream—yes, another dream. This is probably 30 years or so after his dream in chapter two.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed

through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. (Daniel 4:4-6)

All his usual suspects aren't able to interpret the dream for him, so he calls on—you guessed it—Daniel. He tells Daniel the dream, and although Daniel is a bit anxious about telling King Nebby the meaning of the dream, he knows he must share what God has given him to share.

Daniel tells him the good news first: “King Nebby, you are great and you have power over the whole world.”

Daniel then tells him the bad news: “The dream you had means that God is fed up with your arrogance. He's fed up with your pride. He's fed up with your ego. Everything you have in life is because God allows you to have it. But you, King Nebby, have taken all the credit for yourself and you should know better. Remember you built that statue to yourself? Remember we talked about that. That's an ego problem. Remember how God saved those three young men who went through the fire and how you saw that miracle with your own eyes? Remember how you proclaimed then that there is only one true God, and you said that God is God and you are not? But since then, you haven't been serving God; you've been serving yourself, so the time has come for you to learn a difficult lesson.

“This dream that you have had about the tree of doom means that God is going to take away your empire. Not only are going to lose your kingdom, you're going to lose your mind. ‘You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven’ (Daniel 4:25). This will be the case for seven years, or seven seasons, we really aren't sure!”

Then Daniel says, “But here is some more good news: you can avoid it all. You don't have to go through this humiliating experience if you humble yourself—if you will listen to God and start honoring Him with your success.”

In the case of King Nebby, success, for him, was easy to define—power, glory, wealth, and the ability to define what is right and what is wrong for himself! This so closely follows the American success narrative of 2021.

We can't really spend much time on this, but Scripture talks a lot about success and defines it very differently as *following the plan that God has for you*. That plan includes both plans for your character and plans for your life. If you allow God to mold you into the image of Jesus and you go about your daily life living out His plan for you, then you are a success.

Unfortunately, however, King Nebby didn't heed Daniel's warning. He continued to define success on his terms, not God's. He forgot the warning and moved on with his life.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:28-30)

He lost it all. The most powerful and influential man in the world ended up a crazy homeless grass-eater. King Nebby failed the test of success.

Each of us can be expected to be tested with our success. Whatever level of worldly success you have in life, you will be tested. With that in mind, I want us to spend the remainder of our time answering three questions that pertain to all of us.

The first question is: *what gets us into trouble when we're succeeding in life?*

*We get comfortable and complacent with success.* “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous” (Daniel 4:4). The Message version says “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home taking it easy in my palace, without a care in the world.” This happens to all of us, doesn't it?

I find that when things are going well, I talk to God less, I depend on Him less, I praise Him less. Most of us are far more willing to reach out to God in times of need than to give him praise in times of prosperity.

Listen to Daniel 4:30 and notice who Nebuchadnezzar is praising: “As Nebuchadnezzar looked out across the city, he said, ‘Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor’” (NLT).

(Please view the video recording of this sermon to hear the illustration of the first racquetball game Shan played in his 20s versus a guy in his late 60s.)

Throughout the Bible we are warned about the dangers of pride. The middle letter of PRIDE is what? The middle letter of SIN is what? Pride causes sin; it's the root of all sin.

I know God says don't gossip, but I want to.

I know I am supposed to forgive that person, but they need to apologize first.

I know what God says about sex, but I'm going to do what I want because our culture says it's ok.

I know what God says about money, but I'm going to do my thing. I earned it.

Pride is the root of sin. It's what got Satan kicked out of heaven. “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverbs 16:18). We get comfortable and complacent with success.

Another thing that gets us in trouble when we are succeeding in life is that *we don't pay attention to the warning signs.*

A few weeks ago, a good friend of mine was on his way to work. He suddenly felt crushing pain in his chest. This was a warning sign. If he had ignored it, he could have died, but instead he drove himself straight to the hospital.

I was driving this week and my car made its little “ding” noise and told me that I had ten miles of fuel left before I would be walking home. I had no idea because I wasn’t paying any attention. I needed the warning.

In Daniel 4, it couldn’t be clearer. God clearly warned King Nebby. God didn’t just remove him as a leader; He cared enough about this king to warn him first. He gives the king a dream and then brings His servant Daniel to interpret the dream. Daniel tells Nebby what is going to happen to him, and he also tells him how to avoid it. He can avoid this massive fall in his career, this embarrassing experience, if he’ll just humble himself, honor God, and do the right thing! Daniel says, “Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue” (Daniel 4:27).

We are to repent—to renounce our sin. This means that we not only apologize for our sins, but we make changes in our lives that prove we are leaving that sin behind. And we are to serve the those in need. This is the warning that God gave to King Nebby and he totally ignored it.

The third thing gets us into trouble when we are succeeding is that *we put off doing what we know is right*. We procrastinate. We postpone, like King Nebby: “All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later . . .” (Daniel 4:28-29).

What has the king been doing for 12 months? Postponing. Delaying.

If God warned you that you were going to lose everything that you ever worked for in your life if you didn’t change, would you wait 12 months? Only if you weren’t taking the warning seriously.

Here is the truth of the matter: God has warned us! God has warned you and me! It’s right here in the book of Daniel and all throughout Scripture. God says, “If you’ll do these things, I am going to bless you. If you don’t do these things, you’re going to fail.” Yet we put off doing what we know is right.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms

on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.” Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. (Daniel 4:28-33)

He lost his kingdom and he lost his mind. The most powerful man in the world was reduced to acting like an animal in the desert. Humbled. Humiliated.

But God had mercy on King Nebby. God, after a period of time, restored Nebby’s mind and kingdom.

Our second big question is *what steps can you take to recover when you have failed?* We can follow the example of King Nebby as he recovered. He did three things.

First, *he looked up to God*. “At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored” (Daniel 4:34).

This is the first step and some of you need to take it today. You may be in a lot of trouble right now. You’re in a mess in your life and going the wrong way, and you are looking to everything else and everyone else to fix it. You’re waiting for your boss, your co-worker, your counselor, your friend, your spouse, your parent, your government, your bank, or even yourself to solve it. You need to look up to God—get your eyes on heaven, refocus, and look to the only one who has the power to really fix your life.

First Nebby looked up, then second, *he woke up to God’s greatness and started worshiping*. “Then I [King Nebby] praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever” (Daniel 4:34).

Wake up to God’s greatness, not your own. Start worshipping God. When you focus on God’s greatness, that’s called worship. When you worship God, you get your focus off yourself, off your problems, off your humiliation, and you get your focus back on God.

If you aren’t spending time in prayer and Bible study every day, either restart or start for the very first time. Develop that habit.

If you’ve been inconsistent in a life group or if you have never been in one, either get back in or get signed up for Rooted for the fall.

For some of you at home, coming to church simply isn’t possible or it isn’t safe. For others of you, you should be here and you know it. You need to be around believers and be encouraged by what happens when the church gets together to worship the Almighty God. There is nothing more important in your life than worshipping God and connecting in relationship with Jesus.

Let me put that on the screen—and let’s make sure it is in bold print—**THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE THAN WORSHIPPING GOD AND CONNECTING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.**

King Nebby tells us that his sanity was restored and he praised the Most High God. He honored and glorified Him who lives forever. I don't know what bad thing you're going through right now, but I will tell you this—we get better when we replace pride with praise. Pride focuses on who we are and what we've done. Praise focuses on who God is and what He has done. We get better in every area of our lives when we replace pride in ourselves with praise to God.

I have one more recovery step to share in a minute, but I want to move to the third and final question first: *what are truths about God that will stabilize your life?* Nebby says four things about God that he learned in his fall, four of the most comforting things you will ever hear.

First, *God's kingdom will outlast everything I do*. “His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:34).

If you want to make a lasting impact with your life, focus on the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). Make your number one priority something that is going to last—not your career, not your reputation, but God's kingdom.

Second, *God's approval matters more than anyone else's*. “All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him” (Daniel 4:35 NLT).

Everybody else may disapprove of you, but if God approves of you, it doesn't really matter. When you die, who do you want telling you that you did a good job in life? The people around you? Sure, that would be nice, but what matters is God.

The third comforting truth is that *God's power is absolute*, which means He's big enough for any problem you're going to face. King Nebby says: “He [God] does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” . . . And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:35,37).

Now look at verse 36:

When God restored my sanity, he also gave me back my honor and kingdom. All my leaders returned to me, and my kingdom became greater than ever! So now I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven [God] because everything he does is always right and true and fair. (Daniel 4:36)

The final comforting truth is *God never makes any mistakes*. We do, but He does not. We don't always understand why everything is happening, but God does. And it is good and it is right.

King Nebby looked up to God. He woke up to God's greatness and began to worship. Then he took one more recovery step that we learn from Daniel 4: *he told others how God had saved and changed him*.

The King has just gone through a humiliating experience. Have you ever been humiliated, to the point where you just didn't even want to show your face anymore? I certainly have. Have you ever been humiliated when you were the most powerful person on earth and you ended up eating grass in a field alongside the farm animals? That's a new level of humiliation that is greater than most of us have experienced.

King Nebby recognized how God restored him and he wanted the whole world to know. "King Nebuchadnezzar, to the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me" (Daniel 4:1-2).

That's how he started telling his story, the story of chapter four, the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the tree of doom. He wanted to tell anyone and everyone who would listen what God had done in his life.

Let me ask you a question: has God done anything for you? Has God saved you from anything? Has He shown his grace to you? Then who are you telling?

If you think that telling others about how God has saved you might be embarrassing, that is pride, and that is the very thing that got Nebuchadnezzar into trouble in the first place.

Who have you shared Jesus with? Who have you told about how God has changed your life both for the better and for forever? Daniel 4 boils down to the fact that God is God and you and I are not. He is in control. When we remember that, whether we are succeeding or suffering, it's going to keep us stable and keep us humble and keep us from falling.

When I finally leave this earth, in the same way that we give cakes to those leaving our staff, I would love it if God would bless me with a going away from earth cake. I hope it looks like this (please view the video recording of the sermon to see the image) and I hope it has raspberry filling.

Resources:

- All Scripture New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.
- Rick Warren, *When God Tests You with Success*, September 2016.
- Viral Believer – *What is Biblical Success? A Definition*, by Duke Taber – [www.viralbeliever.com](http://www.viralbeliever.com)