

ALISTAIR BEGG

BRAVE

BY FAITH

STUDY GUIDE

**GOD-SIZED CONFIDENCE IN A
POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD**

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.

PSALM 118:13-14



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This study guide was written by Truth For Life and developed from Alistair's book *Brave by Faith* (The Good Book Company, 2021).

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The prevailing wind

is no longer at the back of the sails of professing Bible-believing Christians. Many of us appear to be completely overwhelmed by the reality that some of our views are no longer deemed acceptable. So what does it look like to live as Christians in a society that does not like much of what Christians believe?

Based in Alistair Begg's book *Brave by Faith*, this companion study guide will give you a deeper understanding of how to stand firm and live bravely as a Christian when the wind is blowing hard against you. By exploring questions like "How can Christians keep our courage and hope in the face of opposition?" and "Where is God in our trials?" this nine-session study will help you to set your hope on the God of Daniel as you live as a stranger and exile in this world. Including Scripture passages, hymn lyrics, and questions for contemplation and deeper engagement, this guide can be used for personal reflection or small group discussion.

Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a quote from the chapter, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the chapter and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process each chapter's main ideas
- 4) Giving Praise:** a poem or hymn that can be committed to memory and incorporated in worship

The following words from the book provide a great summary of the overall themes and purpose for this book and study guide:

"This life will not be easy, because there is raging around us 'a continual and irreconcilable war,' and neutrality is not an option. Life may get harder. Society may get unfriendlier. Faith in Christ may become still more unacceptable and obedience to Christ still more costly. But ... Jesus reigns, and Jesus will return. We may not understand every part of the picture ..., but stand back and see the broad sweep of it. God has won. God wins. And so we will prevail too, beyond the battle that you and I are a part of and must fight well in."
—Alistair Begg

INTRODUCTION

THE WIND HAS CHANGED

Getting Started

The prevailing wind is no longer at the back of the sails of professing Bible-believing Christians. Indeed, the wind appears to be blowing hard behind the forces of secularism. (12)

The cultural shift taking place in the West is difficult to accept. Now that Christian values are no longer held or, in some cases, even tolerated by the majority, we find ourselves in a minority position. This will lead to a variety of responses from Christians, from fear, anger, and pessimism to hope and resolve.

What has been your experience of this cultural shift? How have you responded? How can Christians maintain courage and hope amid cultural change?

Going Deeper

1. Alistair explained that in truth, Christians have always been strangers in this world. How might the cultural freedoms that believers have enjoyed in the Western world contribute to our confusion about the location of our true home?

2. Our society's values have changed drastically, but the God of Daniel has never changed. How should God's constancy encourage us not to be overwhelmed by the changes that we see around us?

3. While it's easy to try to escape life's challenges, this is not an option for Christians. Where do we find the strength to face the trials that we encounter?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16)



GIVING PRAISE

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not,
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

"GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS" BY THOMAS O. CHISHOLM

CHAPTER ONE

KNOW YOUR LINES

Getting Started

In the Old Testament, one of the distinguishing features of God's people was the rules they followed about what they would and would not eat and drink. Dietary choice for God's people was not just an external manifestation of nothing much; rather, it was an external outworking of their deeply held convictions about what it meant to belong to God. (21-22)

Though we may claim many beliefs during times of peace and prosperity, it is during times of trial and hardship that our true convictions are exposed. If Christians are unprepared for the day when our faith is put to the test, we will surely crumble under the pressure.

What are some areas in which you need greater clarity and conviction so that you are able to show resolve in times of crisis?

Going Deeper

1. Opposition from an ungodly culture can bring out the best and worst responses from Christians. While Daniel and his friends demonstrated godly resolve, they were not obnoxious rabble-rousers. What might it look like for Christians to demonstrate godly resolve in our culture without becoming a nuisance?

2. Alistair mentioned that while Daniel and his friends were willing to tolerate a lot, they also knew where to draw the line and take a stand. Have you determined where you will draw the line? On which issues do Christians need to take a stand, and when should Christians simply practice loving tolerance?

3. Alistair explained why Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were able to stand firm on their convictions in the midst of opposition. What explanation did he provide? How does this truth comfort you regarding our changing culture and any circumstances in your own life?

4. Alistair mentioned that we will not all necessarily draw our lines in the same places. How can we maintain clear convictions while also being gracious toward other Christians who draw lines differently?

5. “Dare to be a Daniel!” This phrase represents a very common approach to the book of Daniel. Yet Alistair explains that Scripture’s real emphasis is not on Daniel at all. What is the real emphasis? Why is it so important that we grasp this perspective?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.” (Daniel 1:8)

“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15)



GIVING PRAISE

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

“TAKE MY LIFE, AND LET IT BE” BY FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL

CHAPTER TWO

KEEP YOUR CONFIDENCE

Getting Started

Here is the main and the plain thing: human history is under the control of God, and he has a purpose which will be achieved. (36)

The kingdoms of this earth, no matter how mighty they may appear, are all temporary. God, in His sovereignty, causes them to rise and fall. When we stand back and realize that God is a sovereign King with an eternal kingdom, it changes how we respond to threats from our surrounding culture.

How can the reality of God's sovereignty bring you peace of mind as you live amid a culture that doesn't share your Christian worldview?

Going Deeper

1. When none of his wise men could reveal his dream and its interpretation, King Nebuchadnezzar responded with anger, exposing his insecurity and mere humanity. How does anger reveal our insecurities and desire for control? How can the humble, necessary acknowledgment that we are not God free us from our desire to control our circumstances?

2. Alistair pointed out that when Daniel learned of King Nebuchadnezzar's death sentence, he did not respond with panic. Instead, he gathered his fellow believers and turned to God in prayer. What does Daniel's response reveal about his understanding of God? How should this inform our responses to tragic news?

3. Daniel and his companions maintained their belief in the one true God in the midst of polytheistic Babylon. In Western culture, it's considered a virtue not only to tolerate everyone's beliefs but also to affirm those beliefs' validity. Why must Christians refuse to embrace this thinking? How can we respect those who have different beliefs while still maintaining distinctly Christian beliefs?

4. Alistair mentioned that Christians always have something to sing about, even when they are in very difficult circumstances. What reason did he provide? How does this truth help us to overcome a pessimistic mindset?

5. Even if the church becomes a persecuted and despised minority, it is the only institution that will endure throughout eternity. How does this perspective encourage you to be devoted to your local church?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” (Daniel 2:20–21)

“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2:44)



GIVING PRAISE

That Word above all earthly power
No thanks to them abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill,
God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever!

“A MIGHTY FORTRESS” BY MARTIN LUTHER

CHAPTER THREE

OBEY GOD (DESPITE THE CONSEQUENCES)

Getting Started

Idolatry is not only a problem of ancient civilizations. It is a problem of all human societies because it is a problem of human hearts. (48)

It's far easier to identify the idols in ancient civilizations and in the lives of those who live in other cultures than in our own lives. Idolatry often seems to be something “out there” instead of something residing in our own hearts. While our idols may look different from the idols represented in other cultures, they are nevertheless very real.

Can you identify the idols that are most prevalent in your culture? Why are these idols especially cherished?

Going Deeper

1. Alistair pointed out that idolatry precedes immorality and is the reason that immorality is tolerated and promoted. How might this explanation help us to overcome sinful behavior in our individual lives and in society as a whole?

2. Christian obedience sometimes requires us to live contrary to our culture's prevailing values. This may lead to mockery and ostracization. Why is obedience so difficult in such cases?

3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obeyed God even though it would cost them their lives—yet God delivered them. The God of the Bible is a God who delivers. Can you recall times in your life or in the lives of others when God delivered in a clear and powerful way?

4. Why is it important for Christians to know that their faith may not make their lives easier but actually more difficult?

5. While no one wants to endure trials, it's often through trials that Christians find the greatest blessings. What blessings do believers often experience during trials? How can these blessings motivate you to be joyful in the midst of hardship?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:17-18)

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." (1 Peter 4:12)



GIVING PRAISE

"When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."

"HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION"

CHAPTER FOUR

SPEAK OUT (BECAUSE GOD IS BIG)

Getting Started

The extent to which we truly believe in the God of Daniel will be demonstrated by the confidence of our evangelism in a pagan culture. (61)

We frequently avoid sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others because we assume that they will not believe its message. This is especially true when individuals are antagonistic towards the Gospel.

Who are some people you know who seem the least likely to believe in Christ? What truths about God will enable you to share the Gospel with these individuals without fear or hesitation?

Going Deeper

1. When he was warned by Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar did not repent—yet even so, God was slow to bring judgment upon him. Why was God so patient and merciful in His humbling of Nebuchadnezzar? How does this inform how we should view and interact with non-Christians?

2. Alistair mentioned that both God and Christians have a role to play in bringing sinners to faith in Jesus Christ. What is our role in this task? How is it compatible with God's role?

3. Daniel had every reason to rejoice in King Nebuchadnezzar's coming judgment; instead, he felt compassion for him. This compassion compelled him to speak the truth to the king. How does a sincere compassion for sinners keep us from being either vindictive or silent?

4. A small view of God will hinder your ability to evangelize effectively. Why is a proper view of God's greatness essential for fruitful evangelism?

5. Sharing the Gospel with family members, coworkers, and friends who do not believe in Christ comes with risk. We may face rejection or persecution, which can tempt us to be silent. How should the reality of God's judgment upon sinners compel us to speak the Gospel even when it may come at a great cost to us?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."
(Daniel 4:37)

"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." (Acts 16:14)



GIVING PRAISE

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A foll'wer of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His name?

"AM I A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS?" BY ISAAC WATTS

CHAPTER FIVE

SEE THROUGH THE GLITTER

Getting Started

By instinct, we all suppress the truth of what we know to be true about God. We can see it all around us, if we would open our eyes. If we are ignorant of God, it is because we choose to be so. (79)

The prosperity of those who profane God's name and the drift of post-Christian society can discourage God's people. As appreciation for Christian values declines and Christians face opposition, we may be tempted to think that God has forgotten His people.

The story of Belshazzar demonstrates that God simply needs to lift His finger for circumstances to completely change. How does this reality encourage you and change the way you view the prosperity of the ungodly?

Going Deeper

1. At the height of Belshazzar's prosperity, while he was blaspheming God and rejoicing in his own prosperity, his life was taken from him. How does this put worldly success into proper perspective?

2. We all have a tendency to suppress God's truth; naturally, we would rather have a god who agrees with us and fits our preferences. While non-Christians certainly do this, Christians are no less susceptible. Can you think of ways in which Christians might be tempted in this way? How might we guard against this temptation?

3. Jesus is coming again to judge the world. Just as Belshazzar did not expect God's judgment, so much of the world will be caught by surprise when the final judgment is at hand. Many will claim their ignorance, but the world will have no excuse because of the evidence of creation and the evidence of Christ's empty tomb. Why are these two pieces of evidence sufficient to condemn sinners?

4. When Daniel arrived to interpret Belshazzar's dream, the king showed him very little respect. Why did Daniel seem so unconcerned with receiving respect or gifts? How does this encourage you to live as a Christian in the midst of a society that may look down upon you for your faith?

5. Why is it dangerous for a Christian to desire the world's approval? How can Christians overcome this harmful longing?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"Then Daniel answered and said before the king, 'Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another. Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.'" (Daniel 5:17)

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)



GIVING PRAISE

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause;
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame;
I'd rather be true to His holy name.

"I'D RATHER HAVE JESUS" BY RHEA F. MILLER

CHAPTER SIX

SERVE WELL, STAND FIRM

Getting Started

In order not to compromise and blend in with post-Christian culture, we will be tempted to make a run for it, to circle the wagons and isolate ourselves, or to stand outside of our culture and shout at it. Instead, we are to serve, and serve well. (91)

For many, changes in Western society will require a change in the way that they view Christianity. The relatively trouble-free and comfortable version of Christianity that we are familiar with will likely disappear as we become more of a minority. Prejudice and suffering may become more frequent than we ever thought possible, and the authenticity of our faith will be tested.

As a Christian, how can you prepare yourself for the challenges that you may face so that you will remain faithful when the time of testing comes?

Going Deeper

1. Christians are often conflicted about how they are to relate to secular government. We do not know if we should give the government unquestioned loyalty, protest it, or simply separate ourselves from it. How does Daniel's relationship with the government in Daniel 6 help us understand the believer's proper posture toward the government?

2. When reading about Daniel and the lions' den, we tend to think that the story's purpose is to teach us to be like Daniel. Yet while Daniel is an example for us, there is a greater lesson for us to learn. What greater lesson are we to learn from this story?

3. Alistair stated that the decisions we make early in life directly influence those we make later. How does this truth motivate you to be more resolved to please God today?

4. How does present faithfulness prepare us to be faithful when trials come?

5. Alistair questioned whether or not a ban on prayer would make a difference in our lives. Why is it easier for us to neglect prayer when life seems to be going well?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” (Daniel 6:10)

“It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”
(1 Peter 3:17)



GIVING PRAISE

Vainly they watch His bed,
Jesus my Savior,
Vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose ...
Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus my Savior,
He tore the bars away,
Jesus my Lord!

“LOW IN THE GRAVE HE LAY” BY ROBERT LOWRY

CHAPTER SEVEN

TAKE HEART — GOD WINS

Getting Started

Daniel 7 moors us spiritually, and emotionally, in something beyond our optimism or our pessimism. It tells us that things are far worse than we thought, and far better than we've ever hoped. (103-104)

When we experience suffering and disappointment, it can be difficult to believe in God's sovereignty. Since God has the power to protect us from harm, it's during trying times that we're most likely to question His rule.

Can you think of a time when you struggled with the reality of God's sovereignty because of suffering? How can the truth of God's sovereignty and ultimate victory provide strength and encouragement for suffering Christians?

Going Deeper

1. Alistair mentioned that some of us are natural optimists and some of us are natural pessimists. Which way do you lean? How does Daniel 7 help you to have hope while also having a realistic understanding of worldly suffering?

2. How can Daniel's vision of God on the throne help you to persevere in godliness even while evil abounds?

3. Western culture often discourages Christians from evangelizing those from other faith backgrounds. It's often depicted as being unloving and intolerant. Why must Christians reject this view of evangelism?

4. Why should a sincere love for others compel us to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world?

5. How does a big-picture view of God's eternal kingdom keep us from putting all of our confidence in government?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:18-19)



GIVING PRAISE

Come, Thou almighty King,
Help us Thy name to sing,
Help us to praise.
Father, all glorious,
O'er all victorious,
Come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.

"COME, THOU ALMIGHTY KING"

EPILOGUE

JESUS SHALL REIGN

Getting Started

Be who you are, where you are, obedient and confident in the conviction that God is accomplishing the eternal counsel of his will and that he's drawn you into the story into which he drew Daniel and those exiles: the story of how he is bringing his kingdom to this world until the day when it stretches from shore to shore. (122)

Western society's drift away from Christian values can easily discourage Christians. While this discouragement is typically warranted, it is greatly multiplied when we view this world as our home.

How should the reality that this world is not your home help you not to live for its approval?

Going Deeper

1. How does the story about Eric Liddell's refusal to race on Sunday encourage you to "draw the line," regardless of the consequences?

2. Proverbs 29:25 states, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." In what ways can the fear of man hinder us from living for God's kingdom?

3. How does Jesus' reign motivate you to live bravely for God's glory in your current life situation?

KEY SCRIPTURES

"I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (Psalm 118:13-14)

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matthew 13:44)



GIVING PRAISE

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

"BE THOU MY VISION" BY ELEANOR HULL

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