

Small Leader Guide: Daniel 5 – The Writing on the Wall



Warm Up

Pray briefly, asking God to:

- Open hearts to His Word
- Help each person see themselves honestly
- Expose areas of self-reliance and pride

Icebreaker (keep it to 1–2 stories):

- Share a time you relied on your own abilities/resources and then realized you needed help. What did that teach you?

Leader Tips:

- Model vulnerability but keep it brief (1–2 minutes). This sets the tone.
- If someone starts telling a long story, gently say, “That’s really helpful—let’s pause there so a couple others can share too.”



Know It

Scripture & Big Idea

Read: Daniel 5:5–9, 25–28 aloud.

Summarize in one minute:

- Nebuchadnezzar humbled → restored.
- Belshazzar hardened his heart → judged.
- “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin” = numbered, weighed, divided.
- We are all “weighed and found wanting”; only Jesus balances the scales.

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Ask:

- As you hear Daniel 5, do you feel you relate more to Nebuchadnezzar (eventual humility) or Belshazzar (hardness)? Just a word or phrase, no explanation needed.

Leader Tips:

- Use this as a quick “temperature check,” not a full discussion yet.
- If no one answers at first, share your own one-word answer to break the ice.

Discussion

Understanding the Text

- Pragmatism and downfall
 - Question: “What did ‘pragmatism’ look like for Belshazzar? How did relying on walls, supplies, and his own security lead to his downfall?”

Leader Tip:

- If they struggle, prompt: “What were his ‘walls’—physical or metaphorical?”

The wise men’s failure

- Question: “Why could the wise men not interpret the message, even though it was in Aramaic? What does that show about human wisdom vs. God’s revelation?”

The finger of God

- Question: “What’s the connection between God’s ‘finger’ writing the law on stone at Sinai and writing judgment on the wall here? What does that say about God’s authority?”

Leader Tips:

- Keep answers moving. If a debate starts, say, “That’s a good question to explore later; let’s stay with the main point of the passage.”
- Affirm participation, not “rightness”: “That’s a helpful observation,” even if you gently correct later.

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Personal Reflection

Villains vs. heroes

- Question: “Do you agree that we often resemble the ‘villains’ of Scripture more than the heroes? Why or why not?”

Our “walls”

- Question: “What are some ‘walls’ you tend to trust in—money, job, relationships, abilities, reputation? How does that practically show up in your week?”

Spiritual amnesia

- Question: “Have you experienced ‘spiritual amnesia’—forgetting what God has done? What helped you remember?”

Leader Tips:

- This is where people may open up. Thank them for honesty.
- If something heavy comes up, don’t feel you must fix it; acknowledge, “Thank you for trusting us with that,” and move on gently.

God’s power in weakness

- Question: “When have you seen God’s strength show up most clearly in your weakness?”

Treating holy things casually

- Question: “Belshazzar desecrated holy vessels. What are ways we might treat holy things (worship, Scripture, our bodies, relationships, church) casually or disrespectfully today?”

Two categories

- Question: “The sermon said we’re either like Nebuchadnezzar (repentant) or Belshazzar (self-ruled). In what area of your life are you most tempted to live like Belshazzar right now?”

Leader Tips:

- Be the first to admit a personal “Belshazzar area” to normalize honesty.
- If the group goes very deep, it’s okay to use only one question here and leave space for sharing and prayer.

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Share It

Application

Key truths (read or paraphrase):

- Spiritual amnesia is dangerous – we must remember what God has done.
- Pragmatism can become idolatry – trusting what we see more than God.
- We all fall short – only Jesus can “balance the scales.”
- Humility opens the door to restoration.
- Timely repentance matters.

Ask:

- “What would it look like this week to ‘surrender to Jesus’ in one specific area where you’ve been relying on yourself?”
- “How can we help each other notice when we’re hardening our hearts instead of staying humble?”



Live It

Weekly Challenge – have everyone pick ONE:

- Option 1: Memory Exercise
 - Write down 3–5 ways God has shown up in your life.
 - Put the list somewhere visible.
 - Thank God daily.
- Option 2: Surrender Audit
 - Choose one area of self-reliance.
 - Each morning, specifically surrender it to God in prayer.

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- Note any differences through the week.
- Option 3: Humility Practice
 - Ask a trusted person: “Where do you see pride or self-reliance in me?”
 - Listen without defending yourself.
 - Pray about what you hear.
- Option 4: Holy Things Inventory
 - Evaluate how you treat time with God, your body, relationships, church.
 - Pick one area to treat with greater reverence this week.
 - Tell someone for accountability.

Ask:

- Which option are you choosing, and what’s your specific focus?

Leader Tips:

- Go around the circle quickly—1 sentence each.
- Encourage—but don’t force—sharing: “If you’re not ready to share, just say ‘pass.’”
- You can follow up next week: “How did your challenge go?”



Prayer

Closing Reflection & Prayer

Read together: 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.

Ask (one-sentence answers):

- Where do you most need God’s power to be made perfect in your weakness right now?

Pray: (you or several group members)

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- Thank God for His grace in our weakness.
- Ask Him to:
 - Reveal areas of self-reliance and pride
 - Grant humility and timely repentance
 - Help each person remember His faithfulness
 - Strengthen trust in Jesus over circumstances

Leader Tips:

- Keep prayer time focused on themes from the study.
- If you can, mention specific areas people shared, without giving details: “Lord, you heard the situations shared tonight—meet each one with Your strength.”

For Next Week

- Encourage: Read Daniel 6 before we meet again.
- Reflection prompt: What does it cost to remain faithful to God when the world demands compromise?

Leader Tips:

- Remind them via text or group message mid-week to read Daniel 6.
- If your group is new to Bible reading, suggest: Just read it once and write down one question you have.