



## WEEK2 GROUP GUIDE | MESSAGE BY JB POWELL

### START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

**Did you ever grow up believing a lie about something or have an unfounded fear about something? If so what?**

### SHARE

Welcome to our new series entitled, "Gather Round."

*We have all heard that story that we can't shake. The story that had us at the edge of our seats, that warmed and then broke our hearts, the story that made us laugh from the deepest part of our stomach, or the one that hit us at the deepest part of our core until tears leaked out. Stories teach us, inspire us, warn us, and ultimately speak to us. The stories in the Bible are not only compelling to listen to; they are filled with the power of the Lord, and the resurrecting grace that is offered freely to every single one of us.*

*As we walk through this series, we will hear stories that we might have read countless times, and ones that we might not have deemed as significant. Despite the familiarity of the story, there is always room to ask God, "What are you trying to communicate to me through this story?" Let us walk closely with the characters in the story, listen to their words, their hearts, their struggles, and their triumphs. Each story brings us back to the realization that we have an all powerful, all knowing, and ever loving Father who desperately wants us to let Him be the hero of our own story.*

In the message this week, JB delves into the very real challenge we face as followers of Jesus: the challenge of choosing whether we focus on circumstances and fear or whether we focus on God and the liberating freedom he intends for us to live in. As the title indicates, we live in tense times, especially when it comes to those who publicly confess their belief in Christ. As we become more and more a so-called 'tolerant' nation, believers are finding themselves and their voices less and less tolerated in the public square.

Maybe you have experienced hostility, anger or outrage that you are a follower of Christ. Maybe you have felt the pressure to just keep quiet about your values or beliefs out of fear that others will falsely accuse you or misjudge you. If any of those questions sound familiar or resonate with you, then welcome to the family. For thousands of years, believers have been persecuted because of the name of Jesus. Countless numbers of people have been beaten, falsely imprisoned, killed, and run out of their homes because of their belief in Christ. It is happening this very moment as you read this. We should not be surprised at persecution; Jesus even tells us to expect it. So how do we live with peace, purpose, and a soft heart in the midst of this tension?

**How do you personally deal with the feeling of rejection from others who think you are a just another judgmental Christian? How do you allow God to keep your heart soft toward people who disagree with your beliefs?**

**Do you know someone who was hostile toward God and your faith at one time, but is now a follower of Christ?**

## GROW

About 6th century BC, 600 years before Christ, Babylon was the preeminent power in the world. They are the greatest empire because they were a conquering people. They conquered Israel and began deporting and exiling the professional class of people. Babylon would take the artisans, scholars, politicians, military officers and leaders, bring them to the city to live and assimilate into their culture. The idea was to get them so used to the culture that in just a generation or two, they would completely assimilate, worship their gods, wear their clothes and the empire would grow stronger.

The book of Daniel is a story about a man named Daniel, one of these captured Jews, and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three men are leaders who are called out to bow down to the king's idols or face the consequences. These three men have an important decision to make.

**Let's read Daniel 3:1-23** *(Take turns having people read a paragraph at a time)*

In The New American Commentary, Miller describes the intimidation of this furnace:

*Nebuchadnezzar probably chose this means of punishment not only because it was a horrifying way to die but because it was convenient. A huge kiln would necessarily have been available to smelt metal for the gold plating and for manufacturing the bricks to construct the base and possibly the inner parts of the statue itself. Archer describes the structure as follows: "Judging from bas-reliefs, it would seem that Mesopotamian smelting furnaces tended to be like an old-fashioned glass milk-bottle in shape, with a large opening for the insertion of the ore to be smelted and a smaller aperture at ground level for the admission of wood and charcoal to furnish the heat." Baldwin reports that the temperatures in these kilns could reach as high as 1000 degrees centigrade (i.e., about 1800 degrees Fahrenheit). One can only imagine the fear that engulfed the crowd as the flames leaped from the top of the furnace and the smoke billowed forth.*

**Not many have been forced to stand in front of a furnace, but most of us have experienced consequences for our belief in God. Have you ever experienced fear or intimidation when it comes to living out your faith?**

**What stands out to you about the answer that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gave the King?**

**What made these men so bold in the face of fear?**

## **MOVE**

In this week's message, JB talked about how we respond in life when the temperature gets turned up. How do we respond when we are faced with difficult situations? Do we focus on the circumstances and the fear or do we trust in God? The enemy of our soul is very real and Jesus calls him "the father of lies" and that the devil's job is to kill, steal, and destroy our lives (John 10:10). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experienced the threats, saw the flames, yet stood confidently regardless of the consequences, knowing the one true God is "able to save us." (vs.17)

**Let's read Daniel 3:24-30**

**The Lord promises his presence with his people. How do we tangibly see that in this story?**

**Why is it significant that these men were completely untouched by the flames, in fact they did not even smell like fire and stood in the center of it?**

**Is there a current situation where you need to sense God's presence and peace in the midst of difficulty or persecution?**

## **PRAY**

As a group, spend some time praying for each other, especially for the situations that people might be facing today. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

## **TO GO.**

When we go through the flames, God promises to be with us:

**Isaiah 43:1-3**

**But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob; he who formed you, O Israel; "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...**