Preschool–Grade 6

The Handwriting on the Wall

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Humble your heart before God. Knowing the truth is not enough; we have to bow to it.
Bible passage: Daniel 5:1–31. Students read Daniel 5:17–22 and 5:24–31 out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." *Daniel 5:27 (KJV)* and "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." *James 4:10 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Daniel 4 and 5. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Lifted Up or Bowed Down? (5–10 minutes)

Read each situation. If it shows a heart **lifted up** in pride, students stand tall on tiptoe. If it shows a **humble** heart, they bow their heads. 1) You win the game and tell everyone how great you are. 2) You win the game and thank God and your team. 3) Your parent warns you about something, and you say, "I already know." 4) You know you were wrong, and you say sorry first. 5) You treat the Bible like any other book you toss on the floor. Ask: *Which of these is hardest for you?* Say: "Today we meet a king who knew the truth about God and still lifted himself up."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Tell the beginning in your own words: Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords (Daniel 5:1). He sent for the golden and silver vessels his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple of the house of God at Jerusalem, and they drank wine in them and praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone (5:2–4). In the same hour, fingers of a man's hand wrote on the plaister of the palace wall, over against the candlestick, and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote (5:5). His knees smote one against another (5:6). None of his wise men could read the writing (5:8). The queen told him about Daniel, in whom "an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding" were found (5:12). The king promised Daniel scarlet clothing, a chain of gold and the place of third ruler if he could read it (5:16).

Read out loud: Daniel 5:17–22. Old words in this passage:

- **Let thy gifts be to thyself** (5:17): keep your gifts
- **majesty** (5:18): greatness and royal honor
- **whom he would he slew** (5:19): he had the power of life and death over people
- **deposed** (5:20): removed from the throne; **hardened in pride**: made stubborn by pride
- **he appointeth over it whomsoever he will** (5:21): God puts in charge whoever He chooses
- **humbled thine heart** (5:22): bowed your heart low before God

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Tell 5:23 in your own words: Belshazzar had lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven. He used the vessels of God's house and praised idols that "see not, nor hear, nor know," and he did not glorify "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways."

Read out loud: Daniel 5:24–31. Old words in this passage:

- **MENE** (5:26): numbered, counted; **finished it**: brought it to an end
- **TEKEL** (5:27): weighed; **balances**: a scale; **wanting**: not enough
- **PERES** (5:28): divided; it is a form of the same word as **UPHARSIN** in 5:25
- **proclamation** (5:29): a public announcement
- **threescore and two** (5:31): sixty-two (a score is twenty)

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Daniel 5:22 says Belshazzar "knewest all this." What is the difference between knowing about God and humbling your heart before Him?
2. The vessels from God's house were made for worship (5:3). What "holy things" do we have today, and how do we treat them?
3. Daniel turned down the king's gifts (5:17) but still told him the truth. Why does it take courage to tell the truth when it isn't welcome?
4. Daniel 5:23 says God holds our breath and all our ways. How should that shape the way we live each day?
5. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and learned that "the most high God ruled" (5:21). Belshazzar was not humbled. What made the difference?
6. James 4:10 promises that God lifts up the humble. Where do you need to humble yourself this week?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words in Daniel 5:27: **weighed in the balances** means put on a scale; **found wanting** means not enough. In James 4:10, **humble yourselves** means bow low before God on purpose, and **he shall lift you up** means God Himself raises the humble.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Daniel 5:27 this week; keep working on James 4:10 next week too.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "God weighed Belshazzar and found him wanting. Put on God's scale, every one of us comes up short. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. What is something I know about God that I have not yet let change the way I live?
2. What would humbling my heart look like this week, at home, at school or with friends?
3. Write a short prayer asking God to help you put Him first and treat His things as holy.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: each time you are tempted to brag or to say "I already know," stop and thank God instead.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are the most high God, and our breath and all our ways are in Your hand. Keep our hearts humble. Help us not only to know the truth but to obey it. Thank You for loving us and making a way to save us through Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

For the teacher: this lesson leaves out the list of everyone who drank at the feast (5:2–3, 5:23) and the names of the king's fortune-tellers (5:7, 5:11), and it tells the king's death in one sentence (5:30), as the Bible does.

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