

This past week, *Christianity Today*, reported that Franklin Graham (**picture**), son of Billy Graham, had a private meeting with Hillary Clinton (**picture**), presented the Gospel to her and she was wonderfully saved. If you go to her web page, HillaryClinton.com, you'll find she posted a message stating she's become a Christian. Part of it says: "I realized recently that for the past seven years I've been out of my mind—I have been acting like a beast. In the past few days God has opened my eyes—I have denounced Liberalism and I'm now trusting the God of Israel—I have given my heart to Jesus Christ and I plan on spending the rest of my days serving Him."

Wow! What a stunning development! **Unfortunately it's not true.** I just made it up. Don't believe everything you read on the Internet! But I hope it got your attention.

Earlier this year, Dr. James Dobson posted on his web site that he'd heard Donald Trump had made a profession of faith. **This is true!** There are many celebrities and politicians who claim to be Christians: Jane Fonda (**picture**), Carrie Underwood (**picture**), Ryan Gosling (**picture**), Shia LaBeouf (**picture**), even Mr. T. (**picture**). Are all of them truly born again? I don't know. Only the Lord knows the condition of a person's heart. I can only tell you what I've heard. But I know this is true. 2,600 years ago, there was a powerful world leader, the most famous person of his day. His name was King Nebuchadnezzar and he really did have a conversion experience! That's what Daniel 4 is all about. Nebuchadnezzar has been converted to faith in God and Daniel 4 is his personal testimony. It's **A Gospel Tract by a Pagan King**. Please turn to Daniel 4:1-3 (p. 740).

This is the amazing account of this pagan king who learned the truth about God's sovereignty the hard way. Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful man in the world. He even has an imposing name—Nebuchadnezzar. One night while Nebuchadnezzar was sleeping in his palace, he has a very strange dream. He dreams of a vast tree that stretched to the sky. Its branches were so large and strong, all kinds of birds nested in the tree and all manner of animals found shade underneath it. But suddenly the tree was cut down, its branches stripped, its fruit scattered. Nothing is left but a stump bound in iron and bronze. Nebuchadnezzar also dreamed of a man who lost his mind and began to live like a beast among the animals.

These first three verses are the introduction to this wonderful account of God getting Nebuchadnezzar's attention so He could save his soul. This introduction is actually a conclusion. Chronologically, these opening words belong at the end of the story. They grow out of his experiences recorded in this chapter. Nebuchadnezzar is so overwhelmed by God's love, power and dealings with him, humbling though it was, he wants the world to know. He gives God all the glory. Perhaps he reasoned there were many others who needed the same truth he'd learned. So he issues this universal proclamation telling his story, the story of the Gospel's impact on his life and conversion from following idols to worshipping the One true God.

In Daniel 4, we're given the details of Nebuchadnezzar's journey from sin to salvation. This morning we want to see how the most powerful man of his day was made the prisoner of God. We'll see how God works in the lives of people to get them where He wants them to be and how He works in my life and your life in this **Gospel Tract by a Pagan King**. If you're taking notes...

1. No one is beyond the reach of the Gospel. Remember famed atheist, Madelyn Murray O'Hair (**picture**)? She founded the *American Atheists*, but is best known for the Murray v. Curlett lawsuit. It led to the landmark Supreme Court ruling ending official Bible reading in public schools in 1963. In 1964, *Life* magazine referred to her as "*the most hated woman in America*." What do you think the chances are of Madelyn Murray O'Hair coming to Christ? Would you have even prayed for her salvation? What do you think the chances are of one of her children coming to Christ?

As far as we know, Madelyn Murray O'Hair, never repented. But in 1980, her son, Bill Murray (**picture**), came to Christ. Learning of his conversion, his mother commented: "*One could call this a postnatal abortion on the part of a mother, I guess; I repudiate him entirely and completely for now and all times. He is beyond human forgiveness.*" Bill went on to become a Baptist pastor and social conservative lobbyist. Today he serves as the chairman of the Religious Freedom Coalition, a non-profit organization that aids Christians in Islamic and Communist countries. It's the power of the Gospel!

Who do you think is the most unlikely person to come to Christ? Who do you have in your social circle, that humanly speaking, is beyond redemption?

Nebuchadnezzar seemed like the most unlikely candidate for conversion. He's rich, powerful, cruel and arrogant. We usually avoid witnessing to people like him. Yet, the Bible teaches no one should be considered beyond the reach of God's love. We should never consider someone "unconvertible" because he or she is in high society. Scripture

commands us to pray for government leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2). When we do, we should pray for their conversion. If we have an opportunity to communicate with them, we should look for an opportunity to say a word for Jesus.

God's sovereignty gives us encouragement in evangelism. We know winning the lost is not our job. Our job is to share the Gospel, tell the story, talk about Jesus, look for opportunities, pray for open doors. It's God's job to lead us, empower us and give us those open doors. Then, when we share Christ, it's the work of a Sovereign God to convict sinners, creating in them a hunger for the Lord. We don't save anyone. God does it all by himself. We're just participants and spectators of grace at work. That takes a ton of pressure off us. In other words, *"Do your best and sleep like a baby."*

2. Success is often our greatest barrier to salvation. Let's read vss. 4-27. Nebuchadnezzar is the most feared and potent ruler of his day. He controlled the mighty kingdom of Babylon and was unrivaled in power and military might. But he didn't realize all of it was given to him by Almighty God.

Scripture clearly states Nebuchadnezzar was in the place of power because of the will of God. In Jeremiah 43:10 Nebuchadnezzar is called *"My servant"* by God Himself! He enjoyed the success and power he had because God put him in that place. There's no such thing as someone who's self-made. Every success we enjoy is a result of the sovereign will of God for us!

Just the City of Babylon was an architectural marvel (**picture**). Two million lived there. It was the largest city in the world. A wide ceremonial boulevard ran down the center of the city, 1,000 yards long – that's ten football fields. A double-wall system encircled the main city. Its inner wall was 21 feet thick, reinforced with defense towers at 60-foot intervals. The outer wall was 38 feet high; 11 feet wide with watchtowers. Later, Nebuchadnezzar added a defensive double-wall system. It ran for 17 miles and was wide enough at the top for two chariots to pass each other.

Nebuchadnezzar looked out at his city and said, "Look what I have done!" From the roof of his palace he gazed out on all of this grandeur and his heart fills with pride. He failed to give God the glory for his blessings. He's filled with self-importance and begins boasting of his own greatness and ability. Let's read verses 28-30. Note the first person pronouns in verse 30: *"Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"*

Though a great emperor, he failed to acknowledge God. When he captured Jerusalem, he took holy vessels of worship from the Temple and brought them to Babylon to be offered as a tribute to his idols. Here's a man living life independently from God, caring nothing about the will of God in his life.

It's hard for a successful person, successful by this world's standards, to trust Christ. Pride probably sends more to Hell than any other sin, and we all struggle with it. No wonder Jesus said, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*

Nebuchadnezzar's main problem, the thing that kept him from submitting his life to God, is my main problem and your main problem – P-R-I-D-E. He saw everything in his life through the "lenses of I" He thought the power, size and grandeur of his kingdom was because of him. It wasn't!

Don Shula, (**picture**) one time champion coach of the Miami Dolphins, told of a time when he and his wife were on vacation out in Maine. They walked into a movie theater. There were just a handful of people there and when they walked in the people applauded. Shula was pretty pleased with himself that even in Maine he was famous. So he nudged his wife and said, *"I guess there is no place that we can go where I am not known."* Just before the movie started, a guy came over and shook his hand. Don Shula said, *"I'm surprised you folks know me here."* The man's response was, *"Am I supposed to know you? We were just glad when you came in. The manager said he wasn't going to start the movie until there were ten people here."*

Like Nebuchadnezzar, we make much of ourselves. Maybe you're thinking, "I don't have a kingdom. I'm not famous. I'm not rich. I'm not powerful." But we all have our little mini kingdoms we try to make. The default position of mankind is to build himself up, to hoard, gain power, to exercise influence, to think more highly of ourselves and less of everyone else...even to think less of God. It's our default position. We try to practice our own little version of everlasting dominion, apart from the work of God in our life.

How many times have you started a sentence with "I deserve"? "I deserve more respect. I deserve better. I deserve more money. I deserve happiness." We're thinking more highly of ourselves. You may think, "Surely I don't do that. I don't think too highly of myself. I just think appropriately highly of myself." We're living out Romans 3, *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one"* (vss. 11-12).

3. We must care before we share. It's very apparent godly Daniel loved this pagan king. As he wrestled with the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he didn't want to tell the king what he'd learned. He's very troubled when he said, *"My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!"* (vs. 19). Daniel is a great

example of how to share the truth of God's judgement with the lost. We must do it with a broken heart, pointing out the consequences with mercy. Any time we share the truth of Hell, it should be with a tear in our eye and a catch in our voice.

But Daniel doesn't stop with the interpretation. He begs Nebuchadnezzar to repent. *"Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."* We must love people. We must care and show concern.

We need to answer their questions. We must explain the Gospel to them. But our responsibility is not complete until we urge them to make a decision, to respond to God in repentance and faith.

Why do we stop before we ask them if they're ready to make a decision? Because asking for a personal decision is uncomfortable and awkward. Our ego and insecurity get in the way. We might offend them. They might think we're weird or pushy. We could lose a friend. But if someone stepped in front of a speeding car, would you care if you offended them if you pushed them to safety? I don't think so.

Leonard Ravenhill (**picture**) wrote a convicting poem: *Could a sailor sit by idle, if he heard a drowning cry? Could a doctor sit in comfort and just watch his patients die? Could a fireman stand by idle, let men burn and lend no hand? Can you sit at ease in church with the world around damned? We must care before we share.* But we must care or we will never share.

4. Our soul is more important than our sanity. God is so patient. It was a full year before the judgment of God fell. During this time, Nebuchadnezzar probably wrote off the prophecy of his judgment as the babbling of a foolish man. God's delay in sending judgment should never be misinterpreted! You never get away with sin! God, in His grace, will give you plenty of space to repent, but there's always a limit to His patience. While the wheels of God's justice may grind slow, they grind exceedingly fine! Let's read verses 31-33.

When God's judgment came, it's swift and complete. Nebuchadnezzar lost his power, his glory, his kingdom, his wealth. Everything he'd boasted about is taken away in a split second. And he lived like an animal. He's afflicted with a disease now known as "lycanthropy." This is a compound word. *Lycos* means "wolf;" *anthropos* means "man." He's literally a "wolfman." Lycanthropy is the condition of a person who lives like an animal, usually a wolf. It's a serious mental condition! The one before whom millions trembled in fear is reduced to a pathetic, repulsive, ugly beast. This is William Blake's painting of what he might have looked like (**picture**).

God knew how to get Nebuchadnezzar's attention and God knows how to get our attention, too. He knows what it will take to turn our heart to Him. He won't hesitate to touch that area of your life. It's a dangerous game when people try to make God blink. When He wants to get ahold of your heart, He'll do whatever it takes to get your attention. Resistance is futile.

Can you imagine not cutting your fingernails or toenails for seven years? It reminds me of the famous recluse millionaire, Howard Hughes (**picture**). Hughes rented the top five floors of the Xanadu Princess Resort in the Bahamas, living in isolation, paranoid of germs, never cutting his hair or fingernails or toenails, a wealthy man—but miserable.

Imagine the transformation that took place, as Nebuchadnezzar, the beautiful, became a beast. He could no longer live with people but lived outside in the fields with grazing animals. His diet probably wasn't just "*grass*." The word here for "grass" also refers to vegetables and other herbs. He stayed in the open field 24/7, totally exposed to the elements. So in the mornings he'd be "*drenched with the dew from heaven.*"

In actuality, God was merciful to Nebuchadnezzar by taking away his sanity and kingdom. His pride had caused his heart to be far from God. He thought he didn't need God. God showed him Who was in control. Nebuchadnezzar was far better off losing his kingdom and finding God, than keeping his kingdom and ending up separated from God for all eternity.

One author suggests God didn't turn Nebuchadnezzar into a beast, He simply removed the constraints from his heart and Nebuchadnezzar's true beastly nature manifested itself. Look around at the crimes committed today, and you'll admit most of us, if not all of us, have a monster living within – a beast that wants to feed on our inherent sinful nature. Jeremiah 17:9 is accurate, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked—who can know it?"* It's a life out of control. It's so out of control, Nebuchadnezzar even neglects the basics of personal hygiene and diet.

We're all sinners with a bent toward sin. We all have a *monster* living within, a beastly nature, waiting to show itself. Nebuchadnezzar's transformation represents a life out of control. It shows what happens when we take God out of the equation, insisting that He leave us alone individually or as a culture. When we do, God does. He leaves us alone, giving us over to depraved hearts. Without God-given inhibitions, we become increasingly debauched. Eventually, we cease being ashamed of our sinful behaviors. What's worse, we begin to believe immoral behavior is moral.

That's our culture. Remember when David Letterman confessed he'd been unfaithful to his wife. The audience cheered him. Abnormal has become normal. A young person who keeps themselves pure for marriage is ridiculed as weird. Cohabitation, once rare, is the new norm. 54% of all first marriages begin with unmarried cohabitation. But there's another tragic new norm too. Couples who live together before marriage tend to divorce early on in their marriage. Cohabiting couples also have a separation rate 5 times that of married couples and are more likely to experience infidelity.

Why is there a growing increase in lawyers? We don't expect people to tell the truth, to keep their word, to honor their agreement. It's the new norm.

John Gerstner (**picture**), a frequent speaker at the Philadelphia Conference on Theology was giving a lecture on the depravity of man. In his talk, he compared men and women to rats. After he'd finished, there was a question and answer period. Someone who was greatly offended by his comparison of humans to rats stood up and asked Gerstner to apologize. The questioner said he thought it was insulting to compare men and women to rats. John Gerstner replied, "*I do apologize. I apologize profusely. The comparison I made of people to rats was terribly unfair...to the rats.*" Then, he went on to show what a rat does by the gifts of God that make it rat-like. But when we behave like rats, we behave contrary to our design and thus are even worse than rats.

Are you a rat? A beast? You probably don't have lycanthropy. But you look in the mirror and wonder, "What's happened to me? My life is out of control." You might look as pretty or as handsome as ever on the outside. But you're not as pretty on the inside as you thought you were. Hateful, angry, and bitter things flood your mind. Hateful, angry, and bitter things come out of your mouth. You don't like what you see because it's beastly. You have this sense it's God who's exposing the beast within you. It's affecting your marriage, your family, your friendships. Life isn't working out very well. You look in the mirror and you don't see beauty, you see a beast.

For seven years Nebuchadnezzar lived as a wolfman. Remember his dream? The tree was cut down, but the stump and roots remained. Wonderfully, it's not the end of the story. Look what God can do for even a wolfman.

5. God longs for us to turn to Him. Remember this is Nebuchadnezzar's personal testimony. Let's read verses 34-35. Skip down to verse 37. Do you see what he learned. "*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just...*" Here it comes. It took him seven years in God's School of Affliction. "*And those who walk in pride He is able to humble.*" I believe Nebuchadnezzar had an actual conversion experience and we'll see him in Heaven.

As the king relates all the Lord has done for him, you'll notice the change in his character that's evident in his words. No longer is he threatening people who speak against God. He doesn't say God is a great God among other gods. He just praises the Lord for what God has done for Him. He acknowledges God to be the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. He declares the glory of God for all to hear and he does so without shame or reservation. He tells his subjects that he is walking with God.

His last words serve as a warning to everyone who walks in pride before the Lord: God can take you out! Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates a life radically transformed by God's power. His attention is now off himself and his accomplishments. Now he focuses on and exalts the Lord Who intervened in and changed his life. Each of us needs to experience what Nebuchadnezzar has. Not the suffering, but we all need to come to the place where God fills our hearts, our lives and our vision. We need to be in a place where our lives and lips give powerful testimony to His life changing power.

Do you know why we'll see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven? Because one person cared enough to tell him the truth. Daniel was a good enough friend, that he told him the truth over and over again, until finally, as a broken man, Nebuchadnezzar listened to his old friend and is gloriously saved.

Don't ever give up on anyone. I wonder what would happen if each of us dared to be a Daniel? What if each of us found a couple of Nebuchadnezzars, those who seem unsavable and made it our lifelong mission to befriend them, so we could one day see them come to Christ?

Not to sound like a party pooper, one day we're all just going to be little scribbles in the history books. Even the most famous of us will be just a little scribble. What if all of us, instead of working so hard to be the biggest little scribble we can be, instead, loved Jesus and lived for him, glorifying the kingdom of God? What would happen to this world?

It would take courage. It would take faith under fire. But one day instead of just being a little scribble in history, we'd be doing something that actually mattered and our actions would echo throughout eternity.

Conclusion: A Gospel Tract by a Pagan King is a very personal and private intervention of God in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar, bringing him to his knees in humiliation and then in praise. It's a lesson for everyone. Nebuchadnezzar

makes his testimony a matter of public record, even though it doesn't flatter him. What lessons can we learn? **What are the take homes for us?** Along with your own thoughts, consider these:

Worldly success never satisfies. Nebuchadnezzar had it all, but he still couldn't get a good night's sleep. He's on the top of the world; he ruled the known world at the time. But he didn't have any peace when he lay in his bed each night. As long as he could fill his waking hours with activities to occupy his mind, he was okay. When he was all alone in his royal chamber, snuggled under the royal covers of the royal bed, he knew something was wrong, and kept having a troubling dream.

Many of you can relate. Outwardly you're prosperous and content. But there's a big, aching hole in your soul. Something is missing. As long as you can stay busy, you don't notice it. But during those wee hours of the morning, when sleep won't come, you know there's something missing. The same God who changed Nebuchadnezzar is after you, too. He wants to transform your life, too.

Sometimes we foolishly think the only people who need Jesus are the down and out. Yes, they need Jesus. But there are people in Burlington, who, like Nebuchadnezzar, are up and out. You may have bucks deluxe, lots of toys to keep you busy—but you need Jesus, too. Many, after climbing the ladder of success, find it's leaning against the wrong wall. Most Americans spend the first half of their career working their fingers to the bone to find success, only to find they're miserable. Significance is found only in Jesus Christ.

Pride is a form of insanity. Nebuchadnezzar's experience highlights an important principle in the relationship between pride and insanity. Pride is actually a form of insanity. Insanity is a condition in which one loses touch with reality, living in an unreal world. Sanity is seeing things as they are and then living appropriately. Holding too high an opinion of oneself and blowing off God is nuts. When we fail to live up to our capacity and calling as created by God, we're no better off than the beasts of the field. The king's sin made a beast of him. Sin does that in each of us (Romans 1:18-32).

God's promises are often slow, but they're certain. A full year passed after Nebuchadnezzar was warned. Why do you think God waited? 2 Peter 3:9, "*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" Are you a Nebuchadnezzar? You hear a sermon about repentance, get a bit bothered, thinking, "I really need to repent." But after a week or month passes, and everything seems to be "okay" in your life, you tell yourself, "Nah, everything is okay." A year may pass, forty years may pass, seventy years...and everything is fine. Remember "*The wages of sin is death.*" It may be slow, but it's sure. "*But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" It may seem simple, but it's sure.

If God has transformed your life, share it. Like Nebuchadnezzar, you ought to write out your testimony. You can read his testimony out loud in less than six minutes. Like his, your testimony of on should be short and to the point. It should include four basic steps: **1) *My life before Christ.*** You might not have been a Nebuchadnezzar, but you were a self-centered sinner. **2) *How God got my attention.*** Was it a sermon...a passage of scripture? Perhaps your parents or some friend was used by God to get your attention. It might have been a personal tragedy or circumstance that God used. **3) *How and when Jesus changed me.*** Maybe you can't point to a specific day, but you know there was a point when you were born-again. There was a point you knew all you were trusting in is Jesus and His death on the Cross to bring about your forgiveness and for God to take you to Heaven. When were you born again? When did you know it was Jesus or nothing? **4) *My life since Jesus took control.*** Nebuchadnezzar was a changed man, no question about it.

Has Jesus changed your life? How is your life different? The testimony of every Christian ought to be the words of that great hymn: "*What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart...*" Has there been in your life? Are you what Scripture calls a "new creation?" If not, maybe it's because it's never happened...you're still a beast in the field away from God. Come to Him today. Let Him give you spiritual sanity!