

Daniel 1

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[0 : 00] I only went off to summer camp once, like away, overnight.

It was a soccer camp. I was in middle school. I don't actually remember the details of it very much. But I remember moving into the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, that's a mouthful, dormitories, and finding myself sleeping on a bad mattress in a concrete shell of an empty dorm room for that week.

I was there to learn soccer, and I'm sure I did learn a lot about it. But one of my overwhelming memories of it was how disorienting and how unsettled I felt.

Because I had no idea who I was or what I was doing there in so many ways. I was in a place where I had never been before. And I remember I would go down and I would eat dinner at the cafeteria, and there were other guys in the, you know, you'd eat with other guys and you'd sit around and like guys, you just wouldn't talk and then you'd eat and then you'd be done.

And some of them would go off to do who knows what they would do during camp. And I thought, I have no idea how to do this. Or what am I supposed to do? Or where do I go? I was missing the familiar patterns of life, the familiar people around me, the familiar activities that marked my life and my day.

[1 : 43] And without these familiar identity markers, I didn't know who I was. So usually I would retreat to some TV room where I couldn't really turn the lights on and watch who knows what until I went to bed early and lonely.

The question of who we are is a large one. And as we encounter the world that we live in, the question of how identity markers and cultural patterns and forms shape us, how they affect how we understand ourselves is real.

It is not a bad thing, necessarily. It is a neutral thing. These identity markers can push us to either be good or can push us in good directions to be more of who we truly are, or they can seek to conform us in different ways.

This is the beginning of the year. Some of you have just moved to New Haven for school, for work. You are particularly aware this morning of the disorientation that comes from change.

A new school, a new town, a new part of the country, new friends, new patterns, new responsibilities. And with it come a whole mix of things, doesn't it?

[3 : 18] On one hand, you're excited. This is new. There are new opportunities. There are new people to meet. There are new things to try. There's freedom from the old patterns. There are new things to try. There are new things to try.

But probably there's also a bit of fear and bewilderment. We want to grow in these opportunities, but we also want to feel like we belong and to feel like we fit in.

And we don't quite know how to do that. And we need to acknowledge that there's a darker side to these transitions as well. There's a proverbial parable of the frog in the kettle.

If you put a frog in boiling water, it will jump out. It knows that that context is not good and that he will end up as soup if he stays in. And so he jumps back out.

But if you put a frog in lukewarm water and you turn up the heat slowly, the frog will happily go to the dinner table. The danger of being assimilated into a culture without thinking, the danger of being shaped by forces that you're not aware of, the danger of losing who you are in a desire to fit into the context around you is real.

[4 : 35] We love the comfort of fitting in, but we need to recognize this danger. What does the Bible have to say to us about these things?

What is it about knowing God that can help shape and transform how we navigate our lives in light of this?

We are beginning this fall a series on the book of Daniel. Daniel is in the Old Testament. You can start turning there if you want in your pew Bibles. We're going to read it in a minute. Page 737 in your pew Bible is where it is.

We're going to be looking at the first chapter today. But when you look at the whole series of the whole book, the whole book is given to give us an answer to that question of who are we and how are we to live in this world in light of who God is.

I don't want to give you the punchline yet. We'll get there at the end of our sermon. But that's why we're studying the book of Daniel this morning. As we come here, I want to give you some history.

[5 : 50] If you want to pull out your bulletin, if you look near the back, there's a chart, a historical chart. It will give you a date on the column to your left.

On the left-hand side, there's a... Am I doing that right? Yes. Left-hand column is the dates. And then there's the kings of Judah, the prophets that you read in the Bible, and then the rulership of the area that I called Mesopotamia, which is basically Israel, Syria, Palestine, what is now Iraq, Lebanon, northern Saudi Arabia.

This is Mesopotamia. And this is the world in which Daniel lived. And what I want you to see is that in the history of the Bible and of God's people, God had called the people to himself way back at the beginning, right?

And you read through Genesis, Exodus, and into the end of the Pentateuch, the first five, you see God's people being freed from slavery and being brought to the brink of the promised land, which was in Israel.

And then in Joshua and Judges and King Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, you see the story of them taking the land and establishing, God's people established themselves as a sociopolitical nation.

[7 : 08] To worship God and to display his glory in the world. And yet, what you then see is that they didn't do that very well.

In fact, they rebelled against God. They did not trust him, nor obey him, nor honor him, nor worship him as he deserved. And so, slowly, over time, the nation decayed.

In 722, the nation of Assyria came and invaded the northern part of Israel and conquered it. And so, the great nation that God had established had then shrunk significantly.

And then as you look through, you see the southern kingdom hung on for another hundred plus years, had some great kings like Hezekiah and Josiah that brought some needed reforms.

And yet, they were constantly threatened. In the north, by the kingdom of Assyria. In the south, by the kingdom of Egypt. And in 612 BC, the Assyrians were defeated by the Babylonians.

[8 : 16] A new power on the scene. In 605, the Babylonians continued. And they defeated the Egyptian army. The Carchemish, which is actually a town north of where modern-day Israel is.

And so, Babylon came on the scene as the new power. And during that time, as they pushed south after that victory, they came to Jerusalem.

And that leads us to our text this morning. So, let's look together and read Daniel chapter 1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his God, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his God.

Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, used without blemish of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

[9 : 45] The king assigned them a daily portion of food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time, they were to stand before the king.

Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names.

Daniel he called Belteshazzar. Hananiah he called Shadrach. Mishael he called Meshach. And Azariah he called Abednego.

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, nor with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

And God gave to Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my lord the king who assigned your food and your drink, for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? [10:54] So you would endanger my head with the king. Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Test your servants for ten days.

Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you and deal with your servants according to what you see.

So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

So the steward took away their food and wine and gave them, and they were to, the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

At the end of the time when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

[12:14] Therefore they stood before the king, and in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this word.

Lord, we thank you for the story of these, the lives of these, your servants. Lord, as they faced new circumstances and challenging things, Lord, you showed up with them.

God, we pray this morning as we hear this word that you would challenge us, teach us, encourage us, Lord. To know you and to trust in you and to follow you.

Lord, I pray you would use me and my words this morning. I pray that your Holy Spirit would make clear to each of us what you have to say. We pray in Jesus' name.

[13:22] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. How do we face life when we are in exile? This is the story.

These boys were taken away into exile. Where does God meet us in those places where we feel like we are in exile? Let's explore the story of Daniel together.

There are three parts we want to look at as we explore this this morning and what it has for us. First is, what is the crisis of exile? The second one is, what is the opportunity of exile?

And the third is, the God with us in exile. So that's what we're going to look at this morning. First is the crisis of exile.

If you look back with me in verses 1 or 2, in a very terse way, the writer says, And so, the king Nebuchadnezzar of this foreign nation that worshipped foreign gods and had already threatened the nation of God before, if you go back and you look at the story with Hezekiah, they'd already been there.

[14:29] They'd already thrown their warning signs across the bow, so to speak. They showed up. And they besieged the city.

And the king was given into their hand. It doesn't mean that he was necessarily taken away for prisoner. It's a bit tricky to figure out the history of exactly what happened.

But clearly, he capitulated to their rule. And they went into the house of God. And they took special, special things out of the house of God and returned with them to, it says Shinar, I believe, in verse 2.

Is that right? Yes. Shinar, remembering that Shinar is back in the whole, in the beginning of Genesis and the story of the Tower of Babel. It was the place where humanity rebelled against God. And so, he's reminding them that what happened was, from the Israelite point of view, these pagan brigands had broken into their house, had overrun their city, had gone into the temple of their God, and had stolen stuff and taken it back to this place that had no care for God, and in fact, was the symbol of rebellion against Him.

[15 : 54] And friends, if you were a Jew in that moment, all the promises of God would suddenly seem suspect. Where is God? How could this happen?

What about the promises that He gave to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that He would make this place His place for His people forever where He would rule? There is no analogy in our culture because even if Washington, D.C. fell, it is not the religious center of our country.

It is merely the political one. There is no way for us to imagine the depth of crisis that this created in the hearts of a Jew.

Jerusalem, the city of God, was violated by these pagans who worshipped other gods. How could this be?

Who are we? What do we do now? Are the questions that are going to be the hearts of every Jew. And of course, what we see here is just the precursor.

[17 : 03] When you see the history, they came back in 597, and then they came back again in 587, 586. And when they finally came back, they razed the city and destroyed the temple, took the king off into prison, removed all of the best people from the land.

And Israel was no more. What they feared, what they saw happening, actually did happen. The worst of what they had thought would happen.

And they were left wondering, where is God? I wonder if you're here today and you're facing a crisis like that. Where is God? Maybe you've been uprooted from a place you thought you were going to be for a long time.

Maybe you've been brought here to study, for school. But maybe your marriage has fallen apart. And you're left with the wreckage of it.

And wondering, where is God for me? Maybe your job, that looked like the dream job, has turned out to be a nightmare. Where is God in this?

[18 : 16] I want you to note verse 2. Eyes that have eyes to see need to notice these little things. When you're reading Old Testament narrative, you need to look for the little God sightings because it's the writer reminding you that in fact he's behind the whole thing.

Look with me in verse 2 again. And the Lord gave. This did not happen with God wringing his hands in heaven going, Oh no!

How could this have happened? God actually gave Jerusalem and the king into the hands of these pagans.

God was not absent and he was not far off. He was confusing, yes. He was bewildering, for sure. But he was not far off. And as we continue to see the story, we'll see that this is true again and again. But this crisis of these circumstances is then compounded by what happens next in the story.

[19 : 25] Don't forget that the Old Testament writers, as they wrote narrative, wrote beautiful stories. This is just the setting part. Verses 3 through 7 is now the beginning of the action.

Right? Having done this, Nebuchadnezzar went home. He actually went home because his father had died and he was ascending to the throne in a particular, in the fullness of his power. He had been the general as he did this and he was going home to become the king. So he left town pretty quickly. And along the way, he said to the chief eunuch, oh, by the way, I want you to bring some men.

Look with me, 3 through 7. Right? He said, bring some of the royal family, particularly youths. This would have been men. Right?

And they were, by his command, the cream of the crop. Look at what they were. They were from the right families, royal or nobility.

[20 : 24] They were the bold, the beautiful, the best, and the brightest. Right? They were good looking. They were smart. They were competent.

They were able to learn and to teach. They were able to receive the language of the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans was the tribe of people from which the Babylonian empire rose.

So it was kind of like the tribe of Chaldeans became the Babylonian empire. In case you're wondering how those words interact, that's why it's there. Basically, what the king is doing is saying, we want to assimilate the best of them into our kingdom.

We want them to be Babylonian, just like we are. We're going to take them in. And we have a program of assimilation. We're going to teach them.

We're going to train them. The training in the writings of the Chaldeans would have included the Chaldean emphasis on magic and on divination and a number of their spiritual as well as political

and religious worldviews.

[21 : 32] So they're getting trained completely in an alien worldview as good Jewish people. And not only that, but they're being taken as the best specimens and they're going to be given the...

I was thinking about this. It's kind of like, if you remember in the beginning of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe when Eustace goes in and do you remember who he meets? He meets the white witch, right?

And what does she give him? Do you remember? Candy. Toffee, right? What was it? What was the word? Yes.

You guys remember. It's this... Gives them this special... Right? So this is what eating from the king's food I think was like. It's basically saying, hey, you know what? Not only do we bring you in and give you all this training, but man, you get some perks.

You get the apartment. You get the car. You get the, you know, club med. You get all of these perks for being assimilated into the greatness of the Babylonian empire.

[22 : 40] Come and be a part of us. Oh, and by the way, we're even going to give you new names so that you fit in and everyone can say your name without stumbling over it.

We're going to give, take away your names. Each of your names that had, if you look at Old Testament names, always had, Jewish names almost always had either L or Yah or A, you see it in E-L or A-H at the end of names often as because it's referring to God.

They were people who belonged to God and so they had these names. And the Babylonians said, yeah, we're going to give you new names. Ones that don't tie you to your old God.

Ones that don't, that take away yet another culture marker of who you were and who your God was and what your identity was. They didn't get to choose.

This was not a foreign exchange program that they signed up for. They were slaves. They were forced to do this. They were forced to go and they were forced to walk into this program of assimilation.

[23 : 56] And if you're reading the story, you're asking the question, how will they respond? What is going to happen to these boys?

Are they going to be lost forever to the Babylonians? Are they going to become unrecognizable to us because they are going to become so Babylonian?

Before we go on with the story, I want to stop and pause and think about us for a minute because we need to place ourselves in the broader biblical storyline for a minute.

God created a world for us to live in in Genesis 1 and 2. And in Genesis 3, in our rebellion, we said, no, thank you. And God sent us into exile.

God sent us out into a world that no longer lived completely under his rule in obedience to all of his commands and reflecting the fullness of his glory as it had been intended.

[24 : 59] With the fall, with the rebellion of man, the world then was also in rebellion against God. And God sent his people out of the Garden of Eden, the place of fellowship with him and the place of perfection and sent them out to live in exile.

Spiritual exile from our true spiritual home. And as you look through the whole Old Testament, you see these themes again and again and again about how do we get home?

How do we become God's people again? How do we get there without answer? And it's only when we get to the New Testament where we read Paul writing to the Philippians reminding the believers in Christ that their citizenship is in heaven.

Or Peter, in the passage it was read earlier, reminding the believers as they're facing persecution in a fierce Roman season of oppression against the church.

Peter reminds them that they're God's people called by his grace and mercy living as exiles and strangers in this world.

[26 : 18] Knowing that through faith in Christ, now this world is not our home. The home that we long for is the home that is yet to come.

When God remakes this world and renews it to be fully for his glory. When heaven and earth will actually be brought together. This is the big storyline of the Bible.

And so we need to recognize that we, just like these young men, live in exile. And the question is, how do we respond? How do we respond to a world that just like the Babylonians, although maybe not so explicitly or overtly, we live in a world that seeks to train and to shape us in particular ways.

If you were in school, a school has a vision for what kind of person you will be because you go there. If you were in a particular department or a particular discipline in academia, there are all of these unseen forces and sometimes very seen forces that seek to shape you and how you think and who you ought to be in this world.

And when you go to the beach and hang out with your neighbors, when you play, stand on the sidelines of the soccer fields on Saturdays, you are also in a training ground.

[27 : 50] It's a social training ground where your friends and your neighbors have visions of life, of how things ought to be and how you ought to be in this world. How will you respond?

Give you some specifics to think about. How do you respond when the moms in the playground are discussing what school their kids simply must go to or cannot go to?

How do you respond to your lab director who sets an expectation of you working through dinner six days a week when you have a wife and family or a husband and family at home?

What do you do when you get that invitation as a young lady to send a picture to the boy, an invitation from a boy to send you a picture of him, a picture you'd never send to your mom and dad?

What do you do when your coach tells you that your child has made the team but it's a traveling team and you'll be gone a lot of weekends and the games are on Sunday mornings?

[29 : 06] But that won't be a problem, will it? What do you do when your coworkers complain about your boss, what a stickler he is for safety regulations and how it slows down your production and limits your bonus?

What do you do when you walk into a new job and you realize you're off the rack attire, which is really all you can afford? Seems pretty shabby next to all of your coworkers.

These are little tastes, my friends. But what I want you to see is that this crisis is real. Every time you walk out your door, you walk into a world that is seeking to shape you through its messages, through its mediums, through all the various ways.

And the question that it's asking is, who will you be? And friends, there are not rules enough to be able to give you instruction to navigate all of these things.

Ultimately, this is a heart issue. Who will you be? What will your identity be? Who are you going to make yourself in this world?

[30 : 25] Where will you draw the line and say, I'm not going to be to follow what is expected of me and enjoy the acceptance that comes with it?

Where is it that you, in your fear of being overwhelmed, are withdrawing when you need to engage and love the place that you live?

How can you engage in the culture without losing yourself? This is the crisis that life as an exile is all about. And this leads us to my second point.

The possibilities. The possibilities of exile. Look with me again. Look with me again at verse 8.

Because remember, we've read the story up to this point and the story says, what's going to happen to these boys?

Are we going to lose them forever? But Daniel, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

[31 : 30] And therefore, he asked the king's eunuch, the chief of the eunuchs, to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

How did Daniel respond? Daniel saw the danger. Daniel saw the challenge of not becoming Babylonian while he was being forced to live in a world where he was surrounded by it every day.

And the narrative, even in these first two verses, raises all sorts of questions because what it says is, so Daniel said that he wouldn't defile himself. Everyone goes, yay, that's wonderful.

Right? We think he's good. He's standing up against the man. He's saying, I'm going to be free from that. Right? And then, and so we ask for a person and then it says in verse 9 that God gave him favor.

All right, this is all going to work out. This is wonderful. But what happened? He goes and he asks the chief eunuch, can we do this differently?

[32 : 38] Can we try something else? And the answer is, no, I don't think so. The chief eunuch basically says, so you're saying you want me to put my neck on the line for your identity being preserved.

You want me to have the risk of looking bad and not managing this program well in the eyes of a king who's going to down the road throw people who he doesn't like into fiery furnaces?

I don't think so. Some people think, and I think it's a good point, that he does say no, but he does explain himself, and there might be a hint of, if you can solve this problem, if you can make sure you don't make me look bad, go ahead and give it a try.

But I'm not going to risk myself for you. This is all on you. Right? Because it's interesting, because what does Daniel then do? He doesn't go back to the, he doesn't go back to the eunuch and say, okay, I've got a plan, what do you think about this?

He says, no, I've already tried you, but there's this steward who's responsible for the working out. Here's my analogy. This is like asking the head of the department for permission for something and getting a, no, we really don't think we could probably flex our institutional standards for that.

[34 : 02] Then you go to the, to the secretary of the office, and you know that she's really the one that gets anything done anyways, and you ask her, hey, could we do this? And that's what he did.

Daniel said, how about this? We'll test it for 10 days. Just give us vegetables. And let's see how it works out. And you know what?

Daniel even says, and if it doesn't work out, hey, you do what you want. But will you at least give it a try? Now, a couple things I want to say, observations about how Daniel responded.

Overall, the pattern is this, he neither was assimilated fully into the Babylonian world and became a Babylonian, nor did he withdraw. And this is in our culture today.

We have a strong impulse in the conservative church to say, we just want to withdraw. We just want to run away. And we'll see later, there are times to just stand your ground no matter what.

[35 : 06] But here in this story, that's not the pattern. The pattern here is engage. I want to honor you. I want to be a healthy specimen who's going to make you look good.

But I need to not defile myself. I need to draw a line here. And some people wrestle with, was Daniel worried about Jewish eating laws? I don't think so.

Because he drank the wine and there's no problem with that. Was he worried about idolatry and that this food might be food offered to idols? Again, I don't think so. His world was saturated with idolatry.

There's no way he could have escaped that. It seems to me that Daniel chose this as a place to say, I am not going to buy into the seduction, the sort of, the seductive power of, you eat my rich food and then you owe me.

There might be a little bit of that and there might be just a fundamental, Daniel knew he needed to do something, to put a stake in the ground to say, I am a Hebrew first.

[36 : 11] I believe in the one true God of Israel and I am not going to, and I will not be co-opted completely. And he may have just chosen this. It's not clear why, but he did.

He said, I'm not going to defile myself in this way. I'm not going to lose myself in this way. So how do you respond? A couple of observations. First, he looked for a creative, risky, full of faith, out there kind of way.

Right? Again, withdrawal or assimilation, those are easy. They're black and white. Daniel tried something that had never been tried before. And often, that's what it's going to call us to do.

It's going to call us to ask God for wisdom and to try to be creative in that way. He also did it with a desire to do good. He honored the eunuch and said, I'm not going to put you at risk.

He submitted himself to the authorities without giving them ultimate control over himself. He wanted to honor them and to do them good. He was living out, Greg referred to this earlier in a prayer, he was living out what Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29, 7 would tell the exiles as they were taken away fully.

[37 : 28] To seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and to pray to the Lord on its behalf. For in its welfare, you will find your welfare. This was the worldview and the mindset that Daniel took.

Not merely a defensive, how do I avoid this, but how do I actually engage well in this without losing myself? How do I love Babylon without becoming Babylonian?

This is what Daniel was trying to do. And notice too, he had a persistence in trying things and his approach to authority.

He didn't just overrun authority and say, well, I believe in God and so I don't care about you because you're not God. He recognized that the human authorities that he had to navigate, he sought to honor them.

And finally, I want you to see something else. He did it together. The focus on this section is on Daniel, but recognize that it's not Daniel.

[38 : 31] Every time at the end, the summary statements, it's Daniel and his friends, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, right? If you are new to a place, if you are new to New Haven and you are just starting out in your journey, find others to travel this journey with.

Look for others. If you have come here and you're in a job and you don't know anyone else who is even thinking about these questions, come talk to us. Come talk to the church. Help us try to network.

We may not know someone in your office place, but we might know someone in your field. If we don't know someone in your field, we could probably find someone who could at least understand the pressures you're facing and the opportunities that might be before you and to partner together with others because we so easily lose our identity when we try to do it alone.

We don't know that we're a frog alone in the kettle. But when we do it together, it creates all sorts of dynamics of encouragement and support and creativity and accountability.

That's what Daniel did. And so Daniel tried it. And in fact, it worked. So much so that all the other guys stopped getting to eat the king's rich food and got vegetables instead.

[39 : 59] Come back to that in a few minutes. What does it look like to work differently rather than being just like everyone else? As I said, it's hard to give you lots of rules.

Let me give you two examples of people that I know. I had a friend in high school who went off to college at William & Mary. It's a college where the social life is dominated by being a part of a fraternity or sorority.

He, in his desire to engage with his friends, wanted to do that. But if you were a fraternity brother or if you know much about fraternity culture, you know that often the initiation of new members into a fraternity can often include a lot of alcohol.

A lot of alcohol. I know they're trying to reform it. I don't want to throw fraternities under the bus.

Back then, 20 years ago, I know for sure that there was a lot of alcohol involved.

And he had drawn a line like Daniel and said, the one thing I won't do in college is drink because I think it's going to be for me a loss of my identity.

[41 : 08] So he pledged this fraternity but along the way he went to the leadership and says, just so you know, I don't drink. But here's what I want you to do.

As much beer as they drink, I will drink Orange Crush. And you know what? It made him just as sick as the beer did. They all ended up sick outside in the bushes.

But that's what he did. He was creative. It was costly. And yet he was able to maintain his identity. I also know of a friend of mine who when having started a job and done well initially negotiated that Sunday mornings were an inviolable commitment.

They just said, I will work 80, 90, 100 hours for you if that's what it takes. But I need to go to church on Sundays. So whenever those hours come, they can't come on Sunday mornings.

[42 : 17] And as long as you're okay with that, I'm on, I'm your man. It was a line in the sand. And it was a good one that's borne great fruit.

sometimes it takes a lot of creativity to see where those third ways are.

Sometimes there aren't third ways. We will see further on these same guys, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Mishael, they come up to a situation where there's no third way.

They just say, no, we can't bow to the God. And they get thrown in the furnace. They got to deal with that. When we get to there, we'll get there. A couple of chapters. Sometimes there isn't. But, what I want to see is that here with Daniel, there is a model of how to live in exile and maintain your identity which has a strong sense of, you need to engage, you need to think about how to be good and a blessing in where you are without losing yourself.

And it may not, there are no rules on how to do this, but it may mean a change in thinking. It might mean recognizing that school choice is not a matter of right and wrong, but a matter of stewardship of your family, your ministry to your community, and your children.

[43 : 41] And for each person to make wise decisions about how to do that, not under the pressure of those around them. It may mean having to think through what is it that your employer really wants and to propose a different way than what they've envisioned to get the results that they need in a way that doesn't destroy your family life.

It may mean developing radically new and probably odd patterns of dating in this world to say, I'm going to learn how to develop a healthy relationship with someone else that doesn't involve Snapchat.

It may mean praying for some friends who will figure out what good, clean fun and good, crazy fun can look like on a Friday night that doesn't have to be a compromise of your Christian identity. So in the face of living in exile, the question that you need to ask, where have you drawn the line to maintain your identity in Christ?

Where do you need to ask for wisdom and help to develop a creative and new way to engage in your world in the specifics of your daily life?

[45 : 10] to walk through the pressures you are facing without giving in? Where do you see the danger of wanting to withdraw completely when God has placed you in a place for its good?

This is what Peter exhorts the church to in 1 Peter 2. I urge you as aliens and strangers as exiles I urge you as exiles to live such good lives among the Gentiles that though they revile you they will glorify your father in heaven on the last day.

Recognize that the third way is not always going to be popular. Daniel was not popular as we go along in the story. His success did not endear him to his fellow compatriots.

But do we see that ultimately we have a different audience? Because this is the third point that this story wants to remind us of. God gave them as you look you can see there's a refrain.

Look with me in verse 2 and the Lord gave. And look with me in verse 9 and God gave. And look with me in verse 17 and God gave them success.

[46 : 49] God delivered them in this situation. God gave them favor in every possible way. as this story plays itself out what you see is Nebuchadnezzar evaluates all these men after three years and what happens?

They are did you see it? Ten times that's a meta it's like we might use a billion times. They were so far better than everyone else. God gave them great favor and great ability to do this.

God was with them in exile. God loved them and God would be with them and God would be for them. And so the crisis that they started with God how could you let this happen?

Where are you? Who am I in all of this? Is all answered by that little phrase God gave because it means that God was with them. He had not abandoned them.

God had taken them into this place of exile and he had a purpose for them in that place of exile that God was able to provide for them all that they need to continue to maintain their identity and not become assimilated into the culture that they lived in because ultimately they were God's people and this is the identity that they clung to and this is the reality that they were on and God would help them to do that and God would intervene in special and supernatural and wonderful ways to allow that to happen and friends I'll admit to you this is the hardest part of the story for me because I struggle to believe God's going to do that for me as I live in exile I struggle to think is God going to make my life work out okay and of course when we read the New Testament we see that God doesn't always make our lives work out okay in the way that we want them to

[48 : 51] Hebrews 11 is full of all the great saints that God honored their faith and then at the end he has oh and God honored all of these people's faith too when they were killed and when they were persecuted and when they were oppressed and when they were taken off into captivity and weren't released and weren't saved friends we need to recognize that in this story we see these dynamics a situation is difficult the trial is fierce but God's sovereign intervention delivers his people this is true for this story this is in some ways the message of the whole book of Daniel and it is large more larger more largely the story of the whole Bible because we may live or we may die in our identity in Christ but God has delivered his people in Jesus he has come to us in fact think about this the incarnation of

Jesus is Jesus himself entering into the exile of life in a fallen world and identifying with exiles like us who had rejected God and who are living in a world that is contrary to him and in fact his identification with the exile is so great that he goes to the cross and in his death and his resurrection he overcomes that exile and restores a way by which we might now be brought back into God's people and we are called to live in this world as exiles as long as God keeps us here but our home is not here our home is in heaven and that is where we will know that he will vindicate us and that is where we will know that his promises are true and good forever and we know it because he died on the cross and rose from the dead and we can see it in the future and if we cling to that those things as our identity then we can live as exiles and strangers in this world to the glory of

God I pray for our congregation to be full of Daniels and Azariahs and Mishels and who's the third guy I forgot I pray that we will be people who live in exile fighting for our identity working for the good of our land and our city and our world for his glory let's pray oh lord have mercy on us lord

how often we are unaware or unready and unwatchful lord we don't want to live in exile we want to live at home and yet lord our home is not here lord help us we pray help us to know how to follow in the footsteps of these faithful men lord help us to see you as a god who will vindicate who has vindicated lord and who has called us to live now in this in between time as exiles for your glory lord protect us strengthen us be with us do greater than what we would ever ask or imagine for your glory lord i pray that you would make us a blessing to our city and to our world in jesus name amen