

In this series on the life of Daniel, we are looking into his story and seeing what we can about what it means to live in exile and how we remain faithful to the way of Jesus while in exile. Many of the questions we have been asking have been, "How do we remain faithful to God in a world that makes it increasingly challenging." But now, we shift the focus and want to ask the questions. What does it take to influence and change the world around us? What does it mean to influence our Babylon? How do we go about bringing change in our world?

[Daniel 6:1-2](#)

A little background as we get started on this chapter. This story takes place about 60 years after Daniel chapter 1, so Daniel is an old man, around 70 or 80 years old. At this point, Babylon had been conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire, and a new king was on the throne. This empire was the biggest and strongest the world had ever known at the time. It stretched from Egypt to Russia and Eastern to Pakistan.

So Darius, in order to retain power and control over the empire, appoints 120 satraps over the kingdom. The satraps almost function like governors to extend the authority of Darius. Now, over these satraps are three chief administrators. Look who we find at the highest level of the empire's authority—Daniel. He has continued to excel at his work and has done so even across multiple empires and multiple kings.

[Daniel 6:3](#)

Consider the faithfulness of Daniel in sustaining his position of authority and his faithfulness to the way of God. At this point, he has seen two kingdoms and at least three kings, but he is still tremendous at his job. So much so, that the king wants to set Daniel in charge of the entire kingdom. This is rather profound and speaks to the character of Daniel, which is something we will look at in more depth later. But for now, consider that he has distinguished himself in two different cultures. Integrity is a cross-cultural quality.

[Daniel 6:4-5](#)

This should sound pretty familiar. Remember the earlier chapter with Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their rivals were seeking to bring charges against them. The similarity is intentional, which is also why the chronology of the book isn't linear. The structure of the book is a chiasm, which means there are mirror chapters that present very similar narratives that all crescendo into a particular chapter or story, which functions as the center of the chiasm. It was two weeks ago when we saw Nebuchadnezzar's conversion story out of his humiliation in the wilderness. But here, this chapter mirrors chapter 3. This will become incredibly clear when we look at Daniel in the Lion's Den and Daniel's friends back in chapter 3 facing the fiery furnace.

Here, as in chapter 3, Daniel's rivals are jealous of how Daniel is being elevated to the number two spot in the kingdom. So they devise a plan to come against and trap him. But they realize they have no way of doing so because Daniel is so upright in his conduct and excels in his character. The only way they could find to bring charges against Daniel was to turn his religious devotion to Yahweh against him by tricking King Darius.

[Daniel 6:6-9](#)

So the highest group of officials come together to try and persuade the king to issue a decree that would punish anyone who prays to any God other than Darius. Politically this was a way to consolidate power for Darius and attempt to bind together the broad empire under his reign. For Darius, the strategy makes sense, but for Daniel, the fallout is quite literally a death sentence.

[Daniel 6:10](#)

Daniel's response to the decree is shockingly non-reactionary. The text reads in a way that suggests that Daniel simply continued on to what he had always done. He returned home, went upstairs, and prayed three times a day in a practice of what has become known as fixed-hour prayer. The development of daily prayers was not a requirement of the Torah but instead developed as a customary practice during the Second Temple period.

Most likely, Daniel takes up this practice of prayer from this verse in [1 Kings 8:35-36](#). Most likely, this is bouncing around in Daniel's head. He is thinking about being an exile from his land because of sin and because of their failure to properly hold up the covenant with God. Daniel knows the scriptures so well, and he would have been reminded of praying toward Israel as he sat in a distant land trying to consider how to remain faithful and present to his faith. This gave shape to his daily prayer rhythm three times a day—morning, noon, and night. Now consider there is nothing in this text that is a command; there is no command to pray three times a day and no command to pray toward Jerusalem.

So what we infer is that this is part of the practices that gave shape to the life of Daniel. It is something he took up on his own and under his own volition because Daniel understood that this is how you are transformed in exile—through intentional, repetitive practices that open your life up to the work of God. In this respect, it comes to us not as a command but as wisdom, not as prescriptive but descriptive.

Descriptive texts communicate more like history. They are texts written in a specific context that is non-binding for our current moment. Think of the oft-quoted [2 Chronicles 7:14](#). Now, this is a text that is descriptive, not prescriptive. It is exclusively written to the people of Israel who

had a land covenant with God. When we map this onto other contexts and read it like it is written to us, we run into all sorts of problems

So what is interesting about this story in comparison to what we've seen throughout Daniel thus far is that this story focuses directly on what Daniel refuses to give up, rather than what Daniel refuses to participate in. And think about Daniel being around 80 years old. Did you catch that small line in the middle of that verse... "...just as he had done before." What we find is that the life of Daniel has been constituted by this practice of prayer for decades! It isn't so much that this is a formula; pray three times a day for years, and you'll have the life of Daniel, but it is an example of what is possible for a life built on intentionality around the things of God.

Daniel refuses to give in! He refuses to quit, even if it is only for 30 days; he refuses to give in and stop his practice of prayer. I mean, what are 30 days in the course of 80 plus years of life committed to prayer. But he refuses; it would seem like no big deal, but for Daniel, it was. It was worth risking his life for in order to live out his faith in private and in public. This is an inspiring example of living your faith in public. Daniel's faith was no secret; we'll return to this at the end.

[Daniel 6:11-14](#)

The king finds out about their ploy and is furious. He is agitated that he had been deceived and is bound by law to not change the decree he had set into motion. Remember, Daniel was his guy; he envisioned and had set out to make Daniel in charge of the entire kingdom.

[Daniel 6:15-18](#)

The collection of lions was a regular practice by the rich and powerful in the ancient world. It was a show of strength and a show of power. The sealing of the stone by both the king and the nobles demonstrates the rift between the two. Darius probably feared that they would take out Daniel on their own and kill him themselves

Notice that Darius is open to Yahweh's movement to save Daniel. A very different reaction than Nebuchadnezzar's back with the three friends and the fiery furnace. Remember what Nebuchadnezzar said back then, "Then what god could save you from my hand?" Whereas Darius affirms Yahweh, "May your God save you!" A reversal of posture from Nebuchadnezzar to Darius. Darius' natural reaction is a response to Daniel's faith. His faith was not private; everyone knows about his faith and is aware of his faith.

[Daniel 6:19-23](#)

Notice that Daniel's response to the king calling out to him reframes the situation not simply as one of him being saved from danger but also as a vindication from guilt. The conspirators presented Daniel to the king as guilty of his decree, and he was guilty. Daniel never denied his guilt; Darius never even questioned the guilt. Darius' hope was that Daniel would be spared. And Daniel's response is that yes, he had been spared.

What this exemplifies, both here and with the three friends in the Fiery Furnace, is again that the three friends and Daniel were not spared from

the trial, but rather God met them in the trial. In both instances, God preserved them in the trial by his presence with them in the trial

The story of Daniel 6 is not that the innocent, believing confessor can always expect to be saved from martyrdom. But rather, it is the reassurance that while two kingdoms are at play, God's kingdom will endure. It is the tale of two empires. The earthly empire will assert the height of its power in issuing a death sentence, but that will ultimately fail in light of the attempted execution of one praying and seeking the care of the empire that is trying to execute it.

[Daniel 6:24-28](#)

So the end of the story is pretty huge. King Darius writes a letter to the entire kingdom declaring that Yahweh must be feared. This is a pretty intense turnaround for the empire.

Then there is the last line, "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian." You probably have a footnote in your Bible that suggests a better translation, one that most modern scholars would attest to now that reads, "Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus..." It is believed that Darius and Cyrus are the same people going by different names.

Now, if you look over at [2 Chronicles 36:23](#), which is the very last paragraph of the Hebrew Bible (The Bible of Daniel's Day), you see the immense influence Daniel had on Cyrus and the exile.

This statement by Cyrus (who we believe to be Darius) is in effect saying that all those that were carried into exile can now return home to rebuild the temple and return to Jerusalem. All because of the influence of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and certainly the greatest influence—God himself. Their faithfulness and their commitment to what God had called them to do were able to influence Cyrus so much that he let the Hebrew people go free. How profound!

Talk about influence. In the place in which they found themselves, Daniel and the other exiles found a way to influence for good. And that is really the question we have been asking all along. How do we influence our Babylon without having our Babylon influence us?

To close, I just want us to zoom out again and to look at how Daniel was able to influence Babylon. This idea of influence and how it plays out in the Israelites has been a theme throughout this series. If you remember, at the beginning of the book, it was very centered on how we avoid being influenced by the post-Christian culture that is trying to mold us. Here we see the inverse. We see Daniel bringing his influence to Babylon, which is what I want us to explore as we close this chapter.

In the first sermon I gave in this series on Daniel, I briefly noted the distinction between hard power and soft power. Another way to talk about the same dynamic is the difference between coercion and influence.

Coercion (hard power) is a type of influence that is top-down. It is authoritarian and based on your position, the ability for you to make people do what you want them to do, whether or not they want to do it. And when we look historically, people in general, including followers of Jesus, have never done well with this kind of power. Because we are

flawed and sinful, we tend toward corrupt power that we bend toward our own serving. All too often, we believe this is the way or the only means that we, as the people of God, can bring about any change in our world. This is misguided.

Policy and/or law is a type of hard power. It is meant to restrict and retain individuals within its grasp. This isn't always a bad thing; it can lend itself to being a bad thing, but overall it is a form of implementing change.

Influence (soft power), on the other hand, is more center-set, not top-down. It is based not on your position but on who you are as a person. It functions not through manipulation but through convincing. It is centered around the invitation. This is the type of influence that (for better or worse) cultural icons, influencers, and other artists have. It is the ability to create in another the desire to do what you want them to do from within their own will. This is what we are actually after, not coercion over, but influence under and within.

Now, while Daniel was in a position of power, notice that the way he influenced Nebuchadnezzar, Darius (Cyrus), and ultimately Babylon was not through enacting power over. Rather, he influenced these kings through soft power—through the faithful, loving presence of who he was to the leaders around him. You would think that Daniel's ploy was to rise to levels of leadership with Babylon so that he could enact some sort of power move, but his strategy seemed to be to faithfully serve the king in a manner that was built on genuine care and love of others.

Difference between influencing cultures vs. culture

Most of us, myself included, will not have the opportunity to truly influence the Bay Area, the culture, or even the country at any significant level. However, every single one of us has the potential to influence the culture's that we do intersect with—be it our families, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, friends, etc. All of us have been placed into a sphere of influence that looks different and is largely a result of our personality, skill-set, vocation, and social situation. The genius in the diversity of the people of God is that, as each of us grows in faithfulness to the way of Yahweh, we begin to influence all areas of culture by seeking the peace and prosperity of the section of the city we find ourselves involved in. Imagine for a moment what your sphere of influence could look like if it was influenced by way of Jesus?

At times we focus our efforts on how we transform the world, and in doing so, we set our sights too high and fail to actually transform the spheres that we do have influence over. Again, it's not a bad thing, but the reality is that we will not all have the same level of influence as others. But collectively, as we become the people of God and enter into the world around us, we grow in collective influence.

As we collectively pool our influence, we can bring about diverse change by immersing ourselves in the various avenues of society that God has placed us in to influence toward the way of Jesus. Not coerce it, but influence it. The goal is not to "Christianize" our city but to influence it and infuse it with pockets of the Kingdom of God.

So if we have the potential to influence our spheres of influence, what are the lessons we learn from Daniel here in chapter 6 that will guide how we bring about this influence? Here is the bottom line of all that I am saying today as we look at Daniel's example for us. In exile, the strength of our witness is dependent on the depth of our character. Maybe above all the other qualities of Daniel's life in exile, what sustained him the most was his commitment to Lord. What we see in Daniel is a life lived on the trajectory toward the way of God.

Daniel's commitment to the way of God cultivated in him the life of Christlikeness. Most notably is the commitment to his practice of prayer that cultivated in him a life set toward the things of God. For decades, Daniel committed to prayer—regular communion with God through prayer. This had a deeply formative effect on who Daniel became in exile. Let's look back at the text and see what we can glean from Daniel's example for us today on how he was able to foster this deep witness through character.

The Example of Influence

If you look closely at the example of Daniel through this book, you will find two qualities that continue to rise to the surface that gave Daniel the ability to influence his Babylon. And these three qualities are competency, character, and commitment.

Competency - [Daniel 6:3](#)

The first thing that can be done is excellence and competency in whatever vocation God has placed you. The idea presented here is that Daniel's "exceptional qualities" consisted of his work ethic, his acumen, his ability to do his job well. We have seen Daniel now, over the course of his lifetime, demonstrate a quality of work that stands out above the rest.

Put simply; Daniel excelled at his work. He dedicated himself to being really good at the work that God had placed before him. In doing so, he was able to rise to greater levels of influence on those around him. Remember that line in chapter 1, where Nebuchadnezzar and his officials said that they found Daniel and his friends ten times better than the rest in the kingdom.

The reason that Daniel was able to rise to greater levels of influence in the Babylonian Kingdom wasn't just that God's favor was on him, but that he was also really good at what he did. If you want to influence your culture, it is okay to strive to be really good at what you do. Whether that is teaching preschool, coding software, raising kids, writing novels, etc. This is the strategy of God to immerse his people in a variety of ways throughout our world so that we can influence those areas towards the kingdom of God.

This idea of human beings being the cultivators of creation runs throughout the entire scriptures. The work of image-bearers is to rule and reign over creation in the same manner that God would have. We take the raw materials of the world, and we fashion them in such a way that brings about God's vision of flourishing. So the first thing is to be really competent at what you do and work hard at getting better and refining your skills where God has gifted you and called you to work.

Character - [Daniel 6:4](#)

Even when those who were trying to trap Daniel found his character to be unquestioning, his character and stature set him apart from the others. So much so that he gained the trust and respect of King Nebuchadnezzar and King Darius.

What a great description of a person of depth and character, neither corrupt nor negligent. Meaning Daniel did what was right and gave proper care to the work he was doing. Those who were against Daniel and the exiles scrutinized Daniel, explored and vetted his life, and came up with nothing. His character was unmatched. In exile, our character is what distinguishes us in the path of Jesus. We will not be perfect, but the trajectory of our life as we grow in Christlikeness will continue to grow like Christ.

You don't have to be perfect, that is not the call, but you do have to back up the excellent competency in your work with a life that makes people take notice. At some level, your character is your destiny. Who you are becoming is who you are. And your character will catch up to you at some point.

There is a danger in our world that lends itself for us to present a version of ourselves that outpaces our character. It is easy in our world to create and widen a gap between our public and our private life, but this is inconsistent with the way of Jesus. It is a matter of time before this gap catches up to you. As the moral center of our world has shifted from external reality to an internal reality, what has gone by the way-side is the ability and clear cultivation of character. Collectively, we don't have a framework for cultivating character as we have in centuries past.

As this has taken deeper and wider roots, the character stands paramount above most things in our culture. If you become like Jesus and ooze the very aroma of God, that will be noticed in a culture that has grown anathema to the character. Pursue love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control. Don't be flaky, but be reliable and steady. The reality is that our character is the gateway for us to influence the world around us. So if the first is competency and the second is a character, the third and final thing we note in Daniel's example is that of commitment.

Commitment - [Daniel 6:10](#)

Now, remember that we believe Daniel is in his 80s. He is an old man that has dedicated his life to finding communion with God and then allowing his world to flow from that. If we are going to bring to bear actual change and influence in our spheres of influence, we have to be faithful over the long haul. This isn't a flash in the pan issue. This is a deeply broken situation that will require longevity and consistency.

We live in a world that demands everything come to them in an instant. It is a sort of microwave world where we expect things to happen quickly and on-demand. But there are certain things that cannot happen over

the course of Amazon Prime. The development of our character is one of those things. We cannot expedite that process—parenting, marriage, skill, craftsmanship. These are the kinds of things that take a lifetime to continually refine and develop.

Eugene Peterson has a book beautifully titled *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. This is the work of the church in exile. A long obedience in the direction of Jesus. Because as God warned the exiles, what if exile is the experience we were born to have? What if our moment of existence as followers of Jesus in our time is to be faithful in the long haul? Faithfulness in all areas of life, to God, family, friends, city, space, etc. Do not underestimate the power of sustained faithfulness in a world that often cheapens faithfulness.

This is the reality of our moment. We must become people of deep character that is formed at our innermost being by the work of the Holy Spirit so that the whole of who we are grows in-depth to the way of Jesus to influence our world.

Church, this is slow, tedious, difficult, monotonous, and seemingly frustrating work. But the revolution of character begins one person at a time, taking up moments of rich character to be the people of God to those around us. And God is faithful; we see him in the lion's den with Daniel. Even though it will not be easy, the presence of God is promised and evident in influence.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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