

Sermon Transcript from July 31st, 2016 Influence Pastor Alex Rettmann, Bridgetown Church

So, yeah. We're talking about what it means to be followers of Jesus in a culture that doesn't remotely hold the same values that we hold or hold the same morality that we hold to or have the same ideas about nature and the purpose of being human and all of that that we have. How do we actually do that? So, turn in your Bibles to Daniel 2. That's where we're going to be tonight. If you don't know where Daniel is, there's a table of contents in the first few pages of your Bible. You can find it in the Old Testament a little bit after the middle of the Old Testament. Daniel 2 and we're going to read starting in verse 26.

It says this in Daniel 2:26: "The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), 'Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?'"

"Daniel replied, 'No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.'"

If you know the next section, Daniel then goes on to explain the dream and interpret the dream by the power of God to Nebuchadnezzar. Skipping down to verse 46, once he hears this, he says this:

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kinds and a revealer of mysteries for you were able to reveal this mystery.'"

"Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court."

Okay. So, we've been talking about what it means to be a creative minority in a culture that is opposed to you. And tonight, what we're going to talk about specifically is how do we have redemptive influence in that culture? How do we influence a culture that's opposed to us and what we believe? And in order to do that, we're taking a look at the book of Daniel as a model for what it looks like to live in a place that doesn't remotely believe or agree with us. And if you know the story of Daniel, the story that we're entering in is one of exile. The Babylonian empire is increasing in might and strength. They conquer the Israelites. They remove the Israelites from their land, from their home town and bring them to Babylon.

So, you've got to imagine for a second what the Israelites are living in. Entirely new culture, entirely new customs, entirely new people of power in charge of them. Most of the people, most of the Israelites, are subject to slave labor. It's not a pretty situation. So, Daniel's life is one of exile. The idea or the parallel that we're drawing is that to be a Christian in America today is to live as in exile among the dominant culture.

Now, when I say the word "exile," most of you think of a refugee or some sort of displacement camp or the current crisis that we have going on in our world with refugees. And on that level, most of us – I don't know, maybe there are some refugees here – can't relate to it. But, if we think of exile not only as a physical displacement but also an emotional and an intellectual and a spiritual displacement, then this is the common felt experience of Christians in America.

A quick trip through Twitter or any news media outlet will quickly remind you that not only is your opinion in the cultural minority, but that your opinion is dangerous to society's wellbeing and progression. So, we're kind of approaching this and trying to figure out, especially in the liberal, secular culture of Portland, how do we live as followers of Jesus? What do we do? And we've been talking about how the answer for the church in a time like this is not to get more relevant with the culture to just kind of throw in and to compromise and just do what everybody else is doing and say, "Hey, this is the way the we have to do this. We just have to do this because nobody's going to love us, nobody's going to come to church, nobody's going to agree with us if we don't."

That's actually not the answer. And also, it's not the answer to remove ourselves from culture and to kind of start a commune and do our own thing and totally get away from

culture as a whole. But, the answer is to be a creative minority within the culture that uses their position to influence. How do we use our position as Christians to influence? And this is what we see with Daniel. He's not compromising in the palace. He's not eating the food or sleeping with the women. He's not believing the Babylonian myths. But, not only is he not compromising, he's influencing the power around him.

The story of chapter 2, which is the one that we're looking at tonight, is this: basically, King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonians, can't sleep because he just had a horrible dream. And in this dream, all the things that he held dear, his kingdom, his empire, are crushed in this dream. So, he wakes up in a panic and anxiety and he asks, "Is there anybody in this kingdom who is wise enough to be able to tell me what my dream is and then interpret it?"

So, the wise men come before him and they say, "Listen, O king. We can interpret your dream, but you have to tell us your dream first."

And he says, "No, no, no. That's not how it works. You have to tell me my dream and then interpret it and then I know that you're not just making it up."

And the wise men can't do it. So, here's what the king does. In anger he says, "Fine. Kill all of the wise men in the country. Kill them all."

So, he sends out this decree. Well, here's the problem: Daniel has risen to the ranks of one of the wise men. He's one of the elite within the society. So, at one point a man comes to Daniel and he says, "The king wants you dead. We're going to kill you."

It says that Daniel buys a little bit of time. He says, "Hang on. God will reveal to me what the king's dream is and the interpretation."

So, rather than Daniel seeing this is a time to despair, or throws his hands up and just says, "Well, this is just exile. Of course I'm going to do and despair," he sees it as an opportunity to influence by displaying the power of God. Incredible story. So, what I want to look at tonight is specifically how Daniel, in the position he's in as an exile, influences this mighty river of culture that is Babylon. How this teenager influences the entire empire who's just conquered him. It's so unlikely. But, if we want to do the same thing, if as followers of Jesus we don't want to just live on the margins and we don't want to just compromise and do what everybody else does but we actually want to make a difference in the culture for the betterment of God's Kingdom, we have things to learn from Daniel tonight.

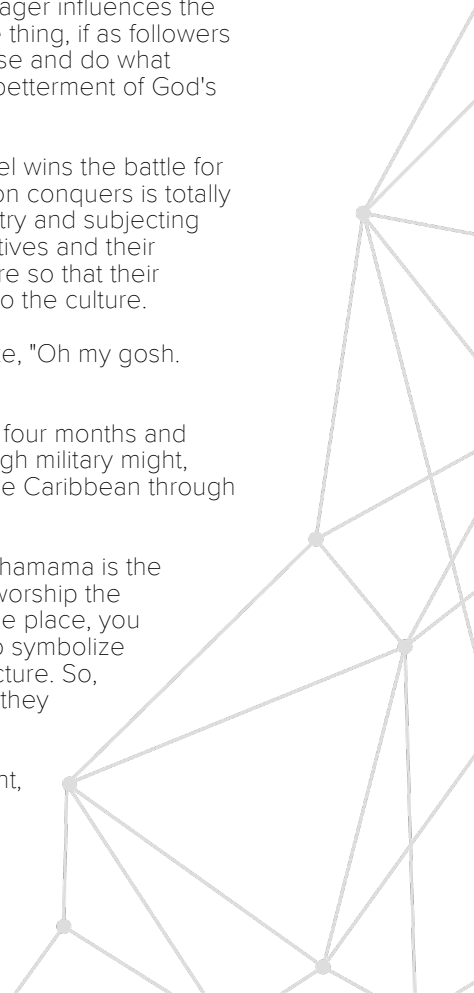
So, if you're taking notes, the first thing that we can learn from this chapter is that Daniel wins the battle for his identity. Write that down. Daniel wins this battle for his identity. The way that Babylon conquers is totally brilliant. Rather than with just pure military might and political might coming into a country and subjecting everyone to slave labor and just marginalizing everyone, they actually take their narratives and their creation stories and their myths and they educate the leaders of that conquered culture so that their leaders of that culture will then influence the culture. Because, as the leaders go, so go the culture.

So, this is actually nothing that's new. I remember, as I was thinking about this, I was like, "Oh my gosh. That's exactly what happened with Spain and South America."

So, when Spain comes to South America to conquer South America – I lived there for four months and studied the history – one of the primary ways they conquered the culture wasn't through military might, though that was part of it. They conquered South America and Central America and the Caribbean through teaching their narrative to the people.

So, for example, the Incan people's primary god that they worship is Pachamama. Pachamama is the mother of the earth, and they would often draw pictures of mountains with faces and worship the mountain. The mountain is god. In fact, if you go to Cusco, Peru – which is an awesome place, you should go there – most of the old, ancient dwellings are built in a trapezoidal shape to symbolize and give remembrance to mountains; an ode to Pachamama even within their architecture. So, these Spanish Catholics come in and they start conquering these people groups and they realize that actually, what conquers better than force is religion. It's shared ideas.

So, here's actually a photo from a Catholic place of worship in Bolivia. This is Mary, right,



in the middle. And either she's wearing a huge dress or something's going on, right? You look at that and you're like, "What is Mary in? That's weird."

So, Mary is this mountain. Why is Mary a mountain? Because, if they can influence the beliefs of these people and say, "Actually, Pachamama is Mary, so you should worship Mary," then they can control them. They've changed the narrative that they believe about who is God and what God's like. So, they're able to then influence them. And this is exactly what's going on with Daniel in Babylon. They have changed his narrative. Daniel is picked as a smart cultural influencer and the king says he will get a three-year education in Babylonian literature, the narrative, the wisdom and their myths. And the goal of it is that he would then go and evangelize the Israelites with these new ideas and these new beliefs.

Here's just one example of one thing that he would've learned that would've shaped him. One of the stories that he would've learned is the "Enuma Elish." The Enuma Elish is the Babylonian creation myth, and it would've been read every year during the Akitu festival. Not only that, but this is something that he would probably learn to memorize. The myth goes something like this. This is something that he would be learning: before the dawn of history – sorry, I always think that's funny to say. Because, if you've ever seen "This is Spinal Tap," they have a song that begins, "Before the dawn of history."

It's like, "When was that?"

So, anyway, a long time ago, where salt water and fresh water meet, there's silt. Okay? And out of this silt arise these gods. These gods get in an argument. One of the gods, named Marduk, starts a fight with Tiamat. I think we have a picture right here. So, on the right, Marduk. On the left, Tiamat. They begin to fight over control of who will be more powerful. Well, Marduk wins and he cuts Tiamat's body in half and one half he uses that body to create the earth and the other half he uses that part of the body to create the sky. Now, there's a lot of carnage and blood and mess and a he realizes, "It's going to take a lot of work to clean all of this up and to make the earth a place that's awesome for the gods to dwell."

So, out of that need, he makes humans. Here's a direct quote from the Enuma Elish:

"My blood will I take and bone will I fashion. I will make man that man may. I will create man who shall inhabit the earth that the service of the gods may be established and that their shrines may be built. Together, humans shall be oppressed and unto evil shall they live."

So, think about this. In the Babylonian creation story, Marduk, this master God, creates human beings to be easily manipulated slave labor to do the work of the lower gods. And then, to make sure later on in the story that the gods don't have to pollute themselves with too much interaction with these human slaves, he makes high priests and kings and ladies of the court and people of the elite class to be image-bearers of the gods from the blood of another god. So, you've got to imagine Daniel comes into the halls of power, he comes into the palace, and they say, "We have a new creation story for you to believe. This is the true one. There are actually two types of people. There are the elite, who the gods tolerate and who are made in the god's image, and there are those who are lower human slaves who were made to serve the elites and the gods. Believe it."

That's a fascinating story, but it's not just a story. The reason why Daniel spent three years learning it is that the narrative that you believe about who you are and where you came from will shape who you become and where you go. The narrative that you believe will shape who you are and where you go. And you've got to think about this. He enters the royal palace and they're saying, "Hey, man. Listen. Everyone else? They're all servants. They're slaves. Take advantage of them. But you, man, you're an elite. Live like it. Eat this. Enjoy this. Drink this. You're an elite now. You're on of us. So, you have to imagine, here's a young man who has this conflicting narrative within him. Because, the Genesis story is also something that he's memorized and the Genesis story says that God creates not out of violence but out of the overflow of love and relationship and that He makes all human beings in His image; not just a select few. And that He creates human beings not to be cheap slave labor, but to rule and reign over His creation.

Now, that's pretty different. Right? That's completely different than the Babylonian myth. Not only that, but Daniel is steeped in the prophetic literature of Israel and He has the promises of God bearing down in his mind and in his soul. Like, think about this. This is in Deuteronomy 30. This would be something that he would've known as he's hearing this Babylonian myth. It says this.

Deuteronomy 30:4: **"Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens,"** – that's probably how he feels – **"...from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors."**

So, there's Marduk and his story and then there's this one and he's torn. Then there's Genesis 49 which is a direct prophecy about his people group; about Judah.

It says this: **"Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet."**

And you've got to go Daniel's like, "Really? Because it seems like the ruler's staff has departed."

Right? But, we see that Daniel, because he doesn't compromise, what that shows us is that he took these promises to heart and he lived on him. He chose to live in the promises of God rather than the cultural narratives of his day that were telling him who he really was. So, he wins this battle for identity by believing what God said about him rather than the cultural narrative. Okay. So, he knows who he is. Point number one. How do you influence? You have to know who you are. Daniel knows who he is. He doesn't let go of it. He knows who he is. But, how do you then move to influence? How do you move to influence?

Well, we also see Daniel living – second point – in cultural and spiritual excellence. As you read through the book of Daniel, you see this guy living in cultural and spiritual excellence. One of the primary themes within the life of Daniel is his ability to move within the culture in the halls of power so freely. If you want to read, look down at Daniel 1:17.

It says this about Daniel: **"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning."**

So, God's helping them learn these things.

"And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."

Fascinating. So, not only does he understand the literature and the cultural narrative, but he also has this spiritual ability to understand dreams and interpret visions. Both. Really, really cool stuff. Then it says this in Daniel 1:18. I love this.

"At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service," – which was the three years of indoctrination in the Babylonian myths – **"the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."**

Wow. So, actually, if you look at this, Daniel and his friends, they paid attention and they studied. They didn't say, "Oh, screw it. We hate Babylon. We're not going to actually learn their garbage."

They learned it. They understood it. God helped them do that. They sought to be excellent culturally. Another example that we have is how he speaks to the king when he has to give the king a negative judgment. So, God is, in chapter 4, giving the king of Babylon a negative judgment about his kingdom. And Daniel says this.

He says, "O great king, if only this was for your adversaries."

What is that? Well, Daniel knows how to speak to royalty. He knows how to speak their language. He understood their literature. He's tasteful in the way that he communicates. But, not only that, he has this spiritual excellence. As you read this story, it's incredible. He interprets dreams on several different occasions. He has a level of boldness in this place of power that just doesn't come from humans. Incredible level of boldness. He's saved, at one point, from lions' mouths. He doesn't get eaten by these lions. It's this great

miracle. He steps into a fire and he's not burned, though other people around him die from the fire.

It's just, "What? How? What kind of anointing is on this guy's life? It's an incredible situation."

Now, some of the most powerful stories in the Bible – and I actually had a list of them and I was going to share them with you, but I'll just let you go discover them like Paul and Esther and Joseph. Some of these powerful stories in the Bible are about people who had the intellectual and social ability to speak to the culture and they dripped with the power and presence of God. They were just constantly spending time in God's presence, and it changed everything.

So often we see, within our own Christian culture, that it's an either/or. Either you're a smart Christian or you're a feeling Christian. Right? Either you're smart or you're feeling. Not both. But, if you want to influence, you have to be both. But, Paul is another great example. At one point – actually, it's really cool. So, this big, stained-glass window, right up here, if you look up, there's this guy teaching this group of people. That's Paul in Athens. And at the bottom it says, "For in Him we live and move and have our being."

That's not a quote from the Bible, that's a quote from a Greek philosopher that's quoted in the Bible. And Paul is speaking with these men in this moment in Athens. He is teaching them that they can find God even within their own culture. He says, "I see you have a statue to an unknown God. Let me tell you who that is. This is your creator. For, even as your poets have longed for and said, 'In Him we live and move and have our being.'"

So, Paul had this incredible cultural sensitivity and had this incredible excellence even within the culture and the literature of the places where he went. But then, it was so fascinating, the next chapter in Acts he goes to Corinth. In Corinth, if you flip over to 1 Corinthians, as he writes a letter to the church of Corinth after having visited them, he says, "I didn't come only in the wisdom of man, but I came in the power of God, for I saw it for your faith not to be based in human wisdom but to be based in Christ and Him crucified, which is the power of God to save."

So, he, in different situations, both coupled excellence culturally to open the doors of power but then also spent time within the presence of God learning what God would say and what God would have for this people group that he could share it with them. Just an incredible, incredible person. And Daniel's the same way. He takes the time to be excellent intellectually and spiritually. And, because of that, he's welcomed into influence and position. He spends time learning the culture. But, ultimately, he isn't changed by it because he spends even more time in prayer and recalling the promises of God over his life.

Okay. I can see some of you are falling asleep. You shouldn't be. It's wrong. Don't fall asleep in church. People sleep and like, I can see you. It's awkward. I go home at night and I'm like, "Why are they sleeping while I'm talking?"

So, what are our takeaways from this? What can we take away? What does this mean for us as followers of Jesus, 21st century, living in Portland, Oregon in this incredible contentious time? There has been other contentious times in history, but, for most of our lifespans, this has been one of the most.

Our first takeaway is this: who are you? Who are you? The first thing that we need to think about as a creative minority is who we are. It's super basic. But, without thinking about our identity, think about this: Daniel, he's drunk every night. He's sleeping with a new woman every day. He becomes a careless aristocrat as his heart is lead astray after Marduk if he doesn't know who he is.

So, if you want to influence in the places where you live and you work, then your identity matters more than anything else. Who are you? You know, I wondered as I studied this past week as I was looking at this passage, "How could these teenage boys say no to the very things teenage boys long for most?"

"You can have sex with whoever you want."

Fourteen years old. How do you say no to that?

"You can eat whatever food you want. This is like a fourth dimension. You thought food was like that? No. It's like this. Come and taste. All the drink you could ever want. You want to get drunk? Have a good time? Go for it."

These are all the things that teenagers fall for in our culture. How are these guys able to say no? The reality is that when you read their story, you realize that these boys had something that they were living in that was better than what Babylon had to offer. They were living in a reality that trumped the reality of the palace in Babylon. You see, these boys are rooted in Israel's story and we're rooted in Israel's story. So, we need to think about this. One of the primary identity texts in the story if Israel is Genesis 15. You've never thought of it before, but it is.

Genesis 15. Some of you guys know Genesis 15. If not, write that down and go read the story later. It's just an awesome part. It's like foundational for what it means to follow Jesus. But, in Genesis 15, there's this incredible moment. Abraham is an old man. Abraham can't have kids, okay, because he's too old. Once you get to a certain age, things don't work the way they used to. He can't have kids. That's his reality. That's what he's living in.

God comes to him and God says, "I've got a new reality for you. Here's the new reality: you're going to have kids."

Okay. So, at this point, Abraham has two realities presented to him. He can believe reality one. Reality one is: "I'm old. My wife is old. All of the miscarriages we've been through. All of the pain. All of the sleepless nights. All of the tears. This is our reality. We are not the kind of people who have kids."

Here's the other reality: God says, "You are the kind of people who have kids and you're going to have kids and you're going to be the most famous man ever. You're going to be huge."

Which reality do you believe? Which reality do you believe? And Abraham in that moment says, "I believe reality number two that what You said, God, is true." And do you know what the next phrase is? Right after that it says, "And it was counted to Abraham as righteousness."

So, you thought righteousness was going to church. You thought righteousness was reading your Bible. You thought righteousness was praying a bunch. Nope. Righteousness is when you have two realities. One reality: "This is just the way things have always been. This is just who I am. This is just my situation. It's just reality."

And God comes in and He says, "Actually, there's another reality I have for you to believe."

When you believe God's reality, you're righteous. That's powerful, isn't it? I love it. Charismatics in the building. So good. So, this is huge. You just heard something that's so huge it could change your entire life. This is so big. What these boys are doing is they're saying, "We have one reality and it's that we're exiles and we live in the palace and we're being indoctrinated and all these pleasures are being thrown at us. And we can choose to live in this, but we know that we're the kind of people who are created to influence cultures regardless of how big they are."

Which reality do you choose? They choose another reality. And do you know what it is? It's right relationship. It's righteousness. And this entirely, because they live this way, because they said, "We're the kind of people, our identity is the kind of people that believe God's reality over what's sensible."

Because they live that way, it entirely changed the way they saw Babylon. It moved them from potential compromise to influence because they knew who they were regardless of what the culture said about them. Okay. Here's where it gets practical. Because so many of you are sitting here right now tonight and you're hearing this and there's a voice, you don't know whose voice it is. It sounds like yours. It must be. I don't know. There's a voice in your head that says this: "Influence? Are you serious? You've got to just survive."

There's a voice that says, "Okay. You will never stop compromising because you said you wouldn't do that thing last Sunday and then look at your last week. You did that thing over and over and over again. So, it's just who you are. You're the person who compromises."

Or, here's another voice: "You aren't the kind of person who changes things because you're not really worth anything."

Okay. There's a voice in all of us that tells you a version of the way that things are, and here's the catch: what you think about yourself only becomes reality when you agree that that voice is true. Okay? So, if you disagree with that voice, it doesn't become your reality. See, because Jesus says this: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Another way you can translate that word "truth" in Greek is "reality," because the word in Greek means "truth as it pertains to reality." Okay? So, another way you could say this is: "You will know reality and reality will set you free."

So, whichever reality you agree with, that's the reality that you're going to live in. And, if you're sitting here tonight and you're like, "Yeah, actually. My life doesn't feel that free. I kind of feel like I'm in a prison of whatever it is," then you've agreed with the wrong reality; you've agreed with a lie. Okay. So, most of us sitting here, we have the voices of our parents, and our friends, and our enemies, and the music we listen to, and the media that we take in, oh, and that guy Satan telling you what's true about you; giving you a lie about what reality is actually like.

And because of that, most of us are the sum total of what we think other people think we are. It's our perception of their actions and their thoughts towards us. So, we're held in this prison and we make decisions based upon what we think that other people think about us. Okay. When you live this way, this is called living in the fear of man. Many of you are living in this tonight. There was a prophetic word before this gathering that said, "God wants to move our church from the fear of many to valuing the presence of God."

Those are mutually exclusive. You can't live in the fear of man and value His presence. You've got to pick. Because, they're two different realities. One reality says, "This is who you are and it's what everybody's always said about you and it's just true. Believe it."

God says, "In my presence, I reveal mysteries to you and I tell you who you really are."

So, which one are you going to believe? We need to know what God thinks about us because, as Christians, we believe that His reality is the right one. So, here's what I want to do. I want to read just a few things. I'm not even making this up. I could just sit here and share with you guys about how awesome you all are, but I'm not making this up. This is what Jesus says about you. So, write these down because I'm going to go quick.

Okay, John 15:15. This is what Jesus says about you: **"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead,"** – this is awesome – **"I've called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."**

Okay. How many of you wake up in the morning and you say, "Friend of God? Feels good." You're laughing because you don't. Because, instead, do you know what you've said? "No. This is just the reality of my life. It's like I suck."

But, instead, God's like, "No. Actually, you're my friend. And you know what I do with friends? I tell them secrets. I tell them about what I'm doing. I tell them about how I'm moving. I tell them about who they are. And this is who you are. You're a friend."

But, you won't live like a friend if you don't believe that you're a friend. Okay? That's just one. Let's go to another one. This one is awesome. This is in 1 Peter 2:9. This is true about you. I don't know if you've thought about it.

"You are a chosen people," – God had a choice and He chose you – **"a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."**

How many of you wake up in the morning and you go, "Feels good to be a holy priest." I know that Jacob does. I know you do. Jacob's one of my best friends in the whole world and he's always telling me, "Dude, you're like a chosen people. You're a holy priest. Have you ever thought about that?"

I'm like, "I don't know. But, you think about that all the time. I should start thinking about

that, because that's what's true."

Here's another one. 1 John 3. This is like the best. I love this one.

1 John 3:1: **"See..."** – he wants all of you guys to see – **"...what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"**

You're a child of God. See, you thought you were a product of what your parents did and what their parents did. No. You're not a product of that. You're a product of God. You're a child of God. You're His offspring. When have you thought about that? Let's go old school, because I just want to show you. It's not just the New Testament. Let's go Genesis. Throw it back. Genesis 1. This is good. Genesis 1 is so awesome.

Genesis 1:27: **"So God created mankind in his own image,"** – whose image are you created in? God's. Wow. That's crazy.

"In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'"

Here's the keyword: **"Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."**

Okay. So, at the very start of the Bible which is kind of unpacking what it means to be human, what does it mean to be human? You were made to rule. Most of you sitting here are like, "Really?"

Okay. You need to let go of the voice in your head that's telling you about reality and believe what God says to be true about you. This is what Daniel understood. Daniel had a vision for what it meant to be human that it means we're royalty. We're made for influence.

When I lived in South America, I was pretty young. I was 19. So, I don't know, some of you guys have traveled. I was there for four months. It wasn't a super long time. But, I was horribly homesick most of the time and I just remember there being so many moments where I'd lay in bed and I just would say to God, "I know that You're with my right now, because I can sense Your presence. But, if I get out of this bed and You don't go with me, if You stay in bed today, I'm going home."

There was this song that I was listening to over and over and over again that Josh White actually wrote. It's just a great song. One of the refrains in it just says, "He will walk with me, He will walk with me."

Sometimes you'll be reading the Bible and you'll go, "Oh my gosh. This thing is jumping off the page to me. That's cool."

It's not just cool. That's a promise over your life that you've got to take hold of. So, I'm listening to this song and it keeps saying, "He will walk with you."

God's like, "That's a promise over your life, while you're here in Bolivia, is that I will walk with you. That's what I'm promising you."

So I remember I just took a sharpie and, right next to where my head laid on the pillow I wrote, "He walks with me."

There probably wasn't a day that went by where I didn't roll over and read that or lay on my bed and just look at that and say, "That's true." Because there were so many different circumstances and things that were going on in my life and at that time that would want me to believe that I'm the kind of guy that God's forgotten about or I'm the kind of guy who God doesn't walk with. And every time I looked at that what I was doing is I was taking hold of the promise that He had over my life that I'm the kind of guy that God walks with.

What are the promises over your life? When you read the Bible and something jumps off the page to you, take that to heart. Own it. You are a son and daughter of a king. You are royalty. You are coheirs with Christ. When you get that and you believe that then you start to live that way. Some of your lives are filled with depression and filled with the

mundaneness of everyday living because you actually don't believe that what God says to be true about you is actually true. When you come down to the front and you receive prayer and somebody says, "This is a word that I have for you," don't just be like, "That's nice." Write it down. Because, there may come a day where you need it. You need it.

I have, in my Bible right now, one of my friends, Lizzy, she's on the high school leadership team, she wrote me this little letter and she said, "You know, I've been doing some listening prayer for you. Here's some things that God was telling me about you."

So, I've looked at it I can't tell you how many times. It's been in my Bible. Every time I open my Bible I pick it up and I say, "This is what's true about me," because, everything around you wants to get you to believe that that's not true about you. So, I've got to have that. Write things down and hold on to them. Go over them over and over and over again.

Secondly – not as long, I promise – practical influence. Practical influence. This is something that we can practically do tomorrow. Once you get who you are and you understand who God sees you to be and who He's made you to be, we're able to move into contentious places with incredible power and without compromising. On a super practical note, the primary place most of you guys will influence will be the place that your vocation takes you.

I really like John Mark's definition of vocation. It's this: "Vocation is your God-given identity and calling. It's your identity in Christ and it's who you are specifically."

It's your personality, it's your character, it's your likes and your dislikes. And when you bring those things together and you think about what you're contributing to the world, hopefully it leads you into some kind of career or some kind of thing, whatever it is. So, whatever you end up doing, whether it's raising children or being a good spouse or working at a tech startup or doing customer service or having a career in politics or in the non-profit world, it is there that you will most likely have your most influence. There's a difference in America between culture and cultures. Culture is the general flow of the Western world. It's the Western culture. I like how John Mark talks about it sometimes. You can go to Thailand and everybody looks like hipsters from Portland because, with globalization and with the internet the way it is, we have access to this general culture. Right?

The reality is that most people won't influence general culture. Most of us will just participate in general culture. There will be some people who do and some of you may even if you enter careers like politics or becoming a professor or you become famous for your rapping or whatever. That'd be awesome if I knew a famous rapper. So, we should be friends if you are.

But, all of us, every single person in this room, will influence cultures. Here's what I mean: wherever you have more than one person there's a culture. Some of you have realized this when you got married. You realize there's actually competing cultures, right? Some of you realize when you get roommates. You're like, "Whoa. There's 8 different cultures in this 1,500 square foot house. There's a lot of cultures here. We've got to figure out how to get along. So, though only a very select few will actually influence the culture at large, we have to remember wherever there's more than one person, there's something to influence.

I used to work at this restaurant when I was in college down in Dundee. It was this kind of wine country, French inspired restaurant. It was awesome. I worked at the deli counter. So, I was making sandwiches and spreading tapenade. Oh yeah. And putting together cheese boards. It was great. I ate a lot. And I remember I could look at the schedule and see who I was going to work with, because I always worked with one other person. So, I could see who I was going to work with and I knew what kind of day it would be.

So, if it was one guy I was like, "Oh, man. This is going to be fun. We tell stories. We have jokes. He's hilarious. It's going to be a good time."

If it was with another guy, I knew it was going to go pretty deep. We're always going to be talking about the meaning of life and all this kind of stuff. He was a really funny guy. He was always saying stuff like, "Hey, man. Don't you think one day we're going to make a robot that's so powerful that the robots will kill us and then they'll, thousands of years from now, be at a deli counter arguing about who made them?"

I'm like, "Uh, yeah. That could happen."

Either way, I knew no matter who I was working with, my call as a follower of Jesus was to influence that culture; to be who I really was in Christ in front of others. That's what influence is. And this is what we see with Daniel. He makes the best of every situation that he finds himself in.

So, these aren't necessarily from the text, but these are things that I've been praying about for you this week and I think it's for Bridgetown. Some practical ways for you to influence the cultures that you're a part of. The first is this. Write these things down, please. Especially you, 7 p.m. Write these things down.

The first thing is this: faithfulness. Faithfulness. You want to practically influence? Be faithful. Your yes is yes and your no is no. So, in order to do that, you have to think about what you've already committed to and what you've already said yes to so that you know what you need to say yes to and what you need to say no to. Think through, beforehand, what you can do and then say yes to it or say no to it, whatever it is. It's revolutionary. This will change the world. If you do this, you will set yourself apart from so many of your peers, especially as millennials.

Something that's going to help you to do this is to keep a calendar. Okay? So, if you don't have a calendar – at the 5 p.m. everybody laughed because they all have calendars. It's silent right now because you don't have a calendar. You need a calendar. Okay? So, get a calendar. And here's what's crazy about calendars. It's awesome. You can put in that calendar what you've said yes to and then, what that day comes, you click on it and it pulls up, "These are things that you've said yes to," so you can do them.

That's pretty awesome. So, you can actually do what you said you were going to do. So, keep a calendar. Right now. "Ah, I've never used that app before." Use it. Okay? Use a calendar. If something truly does come up and you can't make it to what you said you were going to be able to do, do not text that person. Call them. Okay? I'm so sick of this. Like, so many people – this happens all the time with people that I work with. It's like, "Oh, sorry. Can't make it. Sorry man. I'm doing this thing." Send.

I'm like, "Come on. Are you serious?"

What we're called to as Christians is to move into relationship with each other and not distance each other with a text message. So, call the person and tell them, "Here's actually why I can't make it and I need you to understand that I'm sorry about that. I know I committed to this, but I just want you to know that I care."

And, when you make phone call, it says, "I care."

Okay? Because, your honor is on the line. If you believe yourself to be royalty, then you've got to behave like royalty. When you sneak out the back of a commitment, what you're saying is that you don't actually believe yourself to be all that great. It says a lot more about you than anybody else. And, as followers of Jesus, we are that great. This is who we are. We were made to be royalty.

Okay. That's the first one. Second one is this. Write this down. Followers of Jesus influence by celebrating the strength of others rather than being threatened by it. Celebrating the strength of others rather than being threatened by it. If you are getting all of your affirmation needs met by God, then you can praise anyone. See, some of us have bought the lie that if someone else is winning it means we're losing. That is a lie. Economically and socially there's only so much to go around. "In order for me to get blessed, we have to take it from other people and get it to myself."

This mentality has seeped into the way that we see each other's giftings. For them to have that anointing or that gifting means that I can't have it and it's a lie that, as Christians, we cannot believe. When God is your provider, when He's your creator, He has given you an identity of coheir with Christ. So, what Christ inherits, you also inherit. That is so revolutionary. So, you're able to celebrate others because you know what God thinks of you and, because God isn't a respecter of other persons, if He did it for them, He'll do it for you. Just ask. You can celebrate their strengths. You can honor them.

By the way, people who live with this sort of mentality are just more pleasant to be around and probably get promoted and honored more than others who have selfish mentalities. Okay.

Lastly, practically, don't suck up. Alright? If any of you learn anything from social media, it's how to suck up to the people that you're scared of. Do not suck up. Why? Because a suck up is someone who believes their entire fate is in the hands of another human or group of humans. Okay? And is that true for followers of Jesus? No. Our fate is not in the hands of others, it's in the hands of God. So, don't do it. Notice how Daniel never sucks up to the king. As you read through it, he just never does. He treats him as royalty and he gives him the tough truth about his dreams.

Normally, this sort of bad news about the crumbling of a kingdom would insight anger, but Daniel is honored and God is praised. So powerful. It's incredible. For some of you, the places that you work, there is a right opinion to be had and that right opinion will get you places. If you suck up to the right people, if you say the right things, if you agree with the right people who are in power, then you'll get somewhere. But, to give into that temptation is to reject your identity as a child of God and to fear man.

See, we are called to the truth. Jesus says, "It's the truth that sets us free."

So, we have to be people who actually then continue to live in that truth. Think about this: when the children of family do well – right now, all I can think about is the Mannings. Payton Manning and his brother and everything. Football fans out there? Not many of you. Anyway, when you have two awesome quarterbacks that come from your family who go on to win super bowls, your family is freaking honored. Alright?

So, when the children of a family do something that's honorable, the family gets honor. It's the same way in the Kingdom of God. When you do awesome stuff, God is honored. We are not our own. We belong to him. So, what we do and how we do it matters a ton.

Okay, lastly, because I'm running way out of time, my last point is this: Daniel derives his influence from God's presence. We get our influence from the presence of God. This is the most important God. If there is one thing that you can do tomorrow that will change everything, it is creating space in your life to be in the presence of God and His Scriptures and hear what is actually true about you in the situation you're facing. That, alone, if you just take time in your calendar – here you go. You can use your calendar. This is actually what Daniel did. He had fixed times of prayer throughout the day and he opened his window so that people would even see him. "That guy is a man of God."

If you do this, if you set times aside in your day to actually hear from God and listen to Him, it will radically change everything. Flip over to Daniel 2:17. We've got to think about this for a minute.

It says this: **"Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah."**

What's the matter? Well, King Nebuchadnezzar wants to kill all the wise men.

"He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision."

Okay, what do you think he's doing when he gets that vision? The king's issued this decree. "You're going to die because the thing that you have, this wisdom, it's not working for me." Somehow, Daniel buys some time. He's never prayed this hard in his entire life. But, is he asleep? There's no way. There's no way that he's asleep. Daniel's awake interceding probably all night long waiting to hear from God because his life and the lives of his friends are on the line. It is precisely in this low moment that an opportunity arises for influence because of his value for the presence of God.

You see, here's what the fear of man does in this situation. The fear of man instantly resorts to reason. So, you're trying to figure out, "How can I finagle my way out of this situation? They're trying to kill us. Listen. Hey, King. I'm not that wise. Those guys are pretty wise. I've never really been a wise man. That's not really who I am. You don't want to kill me. You want to kill them."

Instantly, what does the fear of man do? It creates separation and it says, "Hey, I'm

actually distancing myself from my community."

This is what the fear of man does to you always. But, when you value God's presence rather than fearing man, you resort to finding solutions from time with Him rather than your own thinking about the matter. You see, there's a very real truth that wherever you turn when everything falls apart will show you what you trust in most. So, when the deal goes south, where do you turn? When the divorce is imminent, what do you do? When the kid you've worked your entire life to feed and house and clothe and raise is now on drugs and spitting in your face, what do you do? When the dreams that you had for your business just remain that, dreams, and nothing actually comes to fruition, what do you do?

Daniel is the kind of man who was shaped by dependence on God and to God's reality rather than the very sensible reality of what's in front of him. This is where our influence comes from. Choosing, in the difficult moments of our vocations, to set time aside, to be quiet, to have a piece of paper in front of us and to know the promises of Scripture. Sometimes you're sitting there and some of you will go home and be like, "I'm going to do what Alex talked about. I'm going to just be quiet," and all you're thinking about is Pokémon Go. Like, that's it. You're like, "What?"

Okay. Are you marinating your mind and your heart in the promises of God and what God actually says is true about you? This is why we read the Bible. We don't read the Bible because you're like, "Hey, you know what I did in a year? I read that whole freaking book."

No. We don't do it because of that. We come to the Bible because in here there's life. In here there's truth. In here there are words about you and your life that will radically change the way that you live. So, when you go to listen, guess what God's going to bring up? "Remember what I said? It's actually true about you. Remember this situation? I have something to say about it. Now you're here, you're poised and you're ready to listen."

See, the Holy Spirit is your greatest asset because, while everyone is working with conventional wisdom, you have access to the imagination of God. Daniel is constantly bringing God's imagination into the public sphere. I heard this great story. I was talking with a buddy of mine. I can't share the details of this story as far as the company or the person. Anyway, he was talking about this person. I was telling him about this message and he was like, "Dude. I have this great story. There was this guy. He worked for this company. Anyway, there's this problem that this company is having in solving this logistics issue. Right? He's not really on the committee, but he overhears what's going on and God speaks to him and he all of a sudden has this idea in his heart."

He's like, "What? If they did that, that might actually work." But he's like, "You know, this isn't really my committee. It's not really my place to speak. But, I just can't shake this. Is it from God? Maybe it is. But, I don't know that they thought of this."

He shares it and they go, "Oh my gosh. We've never thought of this before."

It solves their problem. So then they say, "Hey, listen. I know that you haven't been on any of these committees, but what do you think about joining them?"

They start bringing him in for these various projects so that he can actually then listen to God and tell them what they should do. So, all these various projects. He just, beforehand, says, "Okay. Here's the problem, God. I don't know if you want to say anything."

Sometimes He does, sometimes He doesn't. But, oftentimes, God will speak. And he thinks, "This is an idea that I've just never had before. It's not my idea. I'm not that smart. It must be from the Lord. So, let's share it."

So much so he's done this that the guys around him started saying, "Hey, are you going to do that Jedi mind trick thing again? You know?"

Crazy. Right? So, here's an idea: before your next business deal, before whatever you do for business, the next deal that you have, what if you prayed? Maybe you do. If you do, awesome. Or, here's a really good one: what if you ask God what He thinks about your kids? And whatever comes to mind, you tell your kids. See, that could shape a child's

life. That could shape somebody's life forever. You might be like, "Well, I don't know what I'm going to hear."

Well, okay. Here's the deal: if you have the mind of Christ, then you could maybe, actually be thinking God's thoughts. So then, when you actually go to think and the first thing that comes to mind you're like, "Why do I just keep on hearing that my son is actually not just my son but he's the son of God?"

Well, yeah. That's actually in the Bible. You should share that with him. It might change everything. Or what about this? What if you ask God what He thinks about your roommates? The rubber meets the road. Holy cow. Because, here's the thing: roommates are really hard. Right? It's hard to have roommates. So, what if, instead of arguing about, "Well, you did this and you did this. Here's my deal: you left the sponge soaking wet with nasty filth and now we can't use that sponge because it has too much bacteria."

That was my thing. I hate wet sponges. But, rather than getting caught up in that, you said, "Oh, I'm going to just stop and hear God. Maybe You want to say something about this person."

And then you share it with them. So, next time you see your roommates you're saying, "Hey, I don't know if you've thought about this, but you have an incredible ability to be compassionate towards others."

Well, that changes the cultures. That influences. See, we are not called into the workplace to just survive or defend the Gospel or just to get by, we are called to show people that there's life beyond the mundane and that a relationship with God has access to identity and love and power. How do you defend the Gospel? You let it out of its cage. That's how you defend it.

So, maybe you're here tonight and you're struggling with confidence. You've been compromising over and over and over again and you've begun to believe that it's just who you are and you'll always be that way. Maybe you've never wanted to be the person that you are today and you actually just hate yourself. Maybe you're here and you're just trying to survive. Influence is just the last thing on your mind. Or you don't believe that you're worth anything, so why would you influence anything?

Here's some questions I want to ask you. Write these questions down. What are the promises of God over your life? What are the things that people have spoken over you? What are the things that you've read in the Scriptures? What are the promises of God over your life? This is how Daniel lived. To disagree with what God says to be true about you is to disagree with God. That's huge. Here's another question: when do you spend time in His presence? What time in your day do you actually have set aside, "This is when I'm spending time in His presence?"

You need to hear what He thinks about you so that you can agree with it. We all do that. We all need that. Lastly, what cultures do you shape? Just briefly think. What are the cultures that I actually have influence at? Is it my work, is it my cubicle, is it my home, is it my marriage, is it my roommate, my friendships? What cultures do you have influence on?

Then, this is the last question. What do you value more: the opinions of other people or the presence of God? What do you value more: the opinions of others or the presence of God? Our call is to live in heaven while we're living on earth. And people that we live amongst long for a place of justice. Just think about the divide between race in our country today. People long for a place of peace. Think about the prescription addiction in America. People long for joy and pleasure. Think about the entertainment industry and the sex industry. People long for their lives to mean something. Think about the rates of suicide. The longings of our world are for God's space where there is justice, where there is peace, where there is joy and pleasure and where people actually see who they really are and that they actually matter.

So, when you bring the truth that all of those things can be tasted now, I promise you people will be drawn to it. So, spend time hearing what God thinks about you, wants you to do, believe it and tell it to others. That's how you influence. Let's pray.