

Sermon Transcript from August 21st, 2016 Witness Pastor John Mark Comer, Bridgetown Church

Hey. Turn in your Bibles to Daniel 6. Daniel 6. We're in the middle of a series right now from the book of Daniel that we're calling "Life in Exile: On Becoming a Creative Minority." I feel like it's a really important moment in the story of our church. So, if you're new or just here for the first or second time, to catch you up to speed, the basic idea is just this: we're living in a new cultural moment. Over the last two or three hundred years in the West, but really over the last two or three decades in particular in America and especially at a popular level, so much has changed. It's like the ground has shifted underneath our feet. And we've really shifted from a Christianized, Western European culture that was kind of a mix of a Christian worldview and a pagan and then, later, secular worldview to now we're really into a full-on, post-Christian environment.

Now, of course, this is more or less true depending on where in the U.S. you live. But, here, in Portland, we are, as you know, right on the leading edge, right on the cusp of secularization. Here's a recent survey from the Barna Group of the most post-Christian cities in America. And finally, for the first time in years, guys, we've dropped out of the top 10, which is fantastic news. Don't get too excited. We're at number 11. Alright? But, we used to be really near the top. So, that's actually a huge win for the Kingdom of God. So much church planting over the last decade. That's really a great, great moment. That's right. Whoever was excited, the one of you. It should have been like 800 of you. But, well done. So many followers of Jesus moving into the city to take up residence here.

But, still, the reality is that cities like Portland or San Francisco or New York or San Diego or whatever are really kind of this sign post of a trajectory that America as a nation is on. Towards an urban or metropolitan, secular, progressive, post-Christian, kind of spiritual but not religious moment. The question for you and I as followers of Jesus is how do we not only survive right now, but how do we actually thrive as a creative minority in the corrosive soil of a post-Christian world and right here in our city?

I really think this is a very important time to be a follower of Jesus in Portland. I figure that Portland is about 30 years behind Europe in secularization. But, at the same time, it's about 30 years ahead of the rest of America, in particular the south and the Bible Belt. And I don't mean ahead in a good way. I mean that in a bad way. So, what we're trying to figure out here at Bridgetown is how do we not go the way – as I think about the church my son will grow up in, my grandson or granddaughter will grow up in, how do we not go the way of France or Germany or Sweden or Iceland? I was just there last year. I was teaching at the largest church in the country. It's not about size. You know, we're not even into the megachurch thing here.

But, I was at the largest church in the country and it was 300 people. And that's a small country, but still. How in the world do we not go that way? That is the question for our generation. So, the plan for tonight is to work through Daniel 6 and then, after a while, we'll take a step back and flesh out what it all means for you and me at Bridgetown. Okay? Yep? Here we go. Daniel 6. Hopefully your Bible is open. Verse 1. Come, Holy Spirit. Come.

Daniel 6:1: "It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom,"

Now, a little background here. This story takes place 60 years after chapter 1. So, Daniel, by now, is an old man. Best guess is he's upwards of 80 years old. Babylon, in between chapter 5 and 6, has been conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire and a new king is on the throne. This brand new empire is now the largest empire known to man yet in human history, stretching from Egypt in the south and the west up to modern day Russia in the north and then as far east as the Indus river in what is now Pakistan.

So, it's this wide, expansive kingdom. So, it pleased Darius – that's the king – to appoint these satraps. That's kind of like a governor over the entire empire.

Daniel 6:2: **"with three chief ministers over them, one of whom was..."** – there he is again – **"...Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the chief ministers and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."**

So, here's Daniel, 70 or 80 years old, and not only has he lived through 2 kingdoms and at least 3 or 4 kings depending on how you count, but he's still at it and he's better than ever at his job. To the point the king says, "Okay, dude. You're amazing. I want you to run my kingdom so that I can just chill or whatever a king does in his spare time."

"At this, the chief ministers and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally, these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'"

So, very similar if you remember the story from chapter 3 with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel's coworkers here, we assume, are jealous and angry. "Here's a Hebrew who's now number two in the entire kingdom. He's not even Persian in this case."

So, they come up with this plan to kind of entrap Daniel. But, watch what happens. It's just fantastic.

"So these chief ministers and satraps went as a group to the king and said: 'May King Darius live forever! The royal ministers, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors...' – kind of everybody – "...have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you," – or you could also think about it as like "through you" as almost like a high priest or a medium – "Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.' So King Darius put the decree in writing."

So, jealous, angry machinations right here. They appeal to the king's vanity. It's actually a brilliant idea. Not a spiritual level, but at a political level. It's a way for the king to consolidate power over his brand new kingdom, but it's a death sentence for Daniel. But, in spite of that, watch what happens.

Daniel 6:10: "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done..." – what? – "...before."

The dude is so punk rock. I just love it. He goes straight home and he prays, right through the window, east towards Jerusalem. Now, the odds are his practice was based on this line from 1 Kings 8.

"When the heavens..." – this is a prayer from the dedication of the temple – "...are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you..." – or, in Daniel's mind, when you're off in Babylon or Persia in exile – "...and when they pray toward this place and give praise to your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live and send rain on the land you gave your people as an inheritance."

Can you imagine reading this in the sixth century B.C. and you're dragged away into exile, you're on the other side of the world. Your temple is gone, your city is gone, your nation is gone. Can you imagine reading that Scripture from hundreds of years before? Daniel knew the Scriptures really well and it's more than likely that this the text that shaped his daily prayer rhythm. Three times a day. Morning, noon, night. But, notice, this text, is it a command? It's not a trick question. Is it a command? Is there a "thou shalt open the east window and pray towards Jerusalem three times?" Is it there? Nope. In fact, there is no command to pray three times a day or to pray towards Jerusalem anywhere in the Old Testament or the Bible of his day. This is just a part of Daniel's daily routine.

Now, this story, unlike chapter 1 if you remember that chapter about compromise, this story isn't about a sin that Daniel will not commit, but a practice he will not omit. And if you think about it, it would have been so easy. I mean, imagine you're Daniel. It would have been so easy just to take a month off. I mean, dude, you're 80 years old. You're faithful. We get it already. Okay? Well done. You've done fantastic. You don't have to murder anybody or blaspheme. Just take a month off. Or, you know what, you don't even need to take a month off prayer. Just don't pray by the window. Okay? Pray in the closet or mumble or pray quiet or pray in secret for 30 days. It's no big deal. You're 80 years old. It's okay.

But, apparently for Daniel, it was a big deal. It was worth dying in order to live out his faith not only in private, but also in public. Wow. That is just really inspiring for me. Now, watch what happens.

Daniel 6:11: "Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help." – Which is just great – "So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: 'Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?'"

So, just manipulative right here.

"The king answered, 'The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.'"

So, this is apparently some kind of a constitutional monarchy where even the king is under the law.

"Then they said to the king, 'Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.' When the king heard this, he was [ticked off]; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort from sunset in order to save him."

So, the king is made. He's upset. He realizes, "Oh my gosh. This was all machinations."

"Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, 'Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.'"

Hint, hint.

"So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den."

So, lion hunting was a favorite pastime for king's in the ancient Near East. Here's a picture of an Assyrian king from right around the same time. A king would often keep lions for any kind of a public execution for a traitor or something like that; a threat to the throne. All the way up to the first century, actually, where followers of Jesus into the first, second, even third century were thrown to the lions in the coliseum in Rome.

So, "He threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, be able to save you!'"

So, the king knows about Daniel's faith. His coworkers all know about Daniel's faith. It is not a secret.

"A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation may not be changed."

Just to make sure everything is above par.

"Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him.

"At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice," – this is the next morning – "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

"Daniel answered, 'May the king live forever!'"

Can you imagine that voice coming up out of the pit?

"My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight." – Remember that line – "Nor have I done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.'"

"The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted out from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God."

For those of you thinking, "Wait a minute. What about the law?"

There was an ancient legal custom called innocence by ordeal where, long story short, if a defendant's guilt was at all in question, they would put him through some kind of a test of fire, for example in chapter 3, or poison. Right here it's a lions' den. The most common was "water ordeal," it was called, where they would put you in a life or death situation, say throw you into the middle of a river, and if you made it out, it was a sign that God or the gods had cleared your name, you were innocent. And if you died, well, you were guilty.

So, our legal system has come a long way over the years. So, when Daniel is there awake and alive the next morning, that, to an ancient Near Easterner, would have been a sign that, "Oh my gosh. God cleared this man's name. He's not guilty. He is innocent."

"At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children."

So, this is just an ancient, barbaric, violent time in history.

"And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

"Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth."

Notice this ending. This is a letter.

"May you prosper greatly!

"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

"So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

Okay, the ending of this story is huge. First, Darius writes a letter to the entire kingdom saying that everyone "must fear and reverence the God of Daniel." So, that's a huge win. And then, that's not all. That last line there is actually key. "During the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

If you have an NIV or ESV or any kind of recent translation, you notice there's an endnote right there. So, if you look down at your margin, notice that it can be translated, "Darius, that is, Cyrus the Persian."

So, most scholars think that's a better way to translate the Aramaic here. That Darius is actually another name for Cyrus. Kings in the ancient Near East would often have more than one name. Kind of like a hip-hop artist, but before there was hip-hop. Now, tomorrow, here's what you need to see. This is just really great. Tomorrow morning, when you finish reading through the Old Testament, you'll come to – in the Christian Bible, 2 Chronicles isn't actually at the end. Malachi is. But, in the Hebrew Bible and the Bible of Jesus' day, this was at the end of it. 2 Chronicles. You'll come to literally the last paragraph and the last line in the Bible of Daniel's day and you'll read this:

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia," – we think it's the exact same king in the exact same year. Okay? So, parallel with the story we just read – "in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among

you may go up, and may the Lord their God be with them."

How cool is that? Because of the influence of Daniel and others as well, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah and, above all, the influence of the Spirit of God, Cyrus, also known as Darius, we assume, not only sends out a letter to the entire empire, "Everyone must reverence this Yahweh; this one, true creator God," but he also sends the Hebrew people, "Whoever. You want to go? You're free. You want to go? You're free." He sends the Hebrew people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the city, to rebuild the nation from the ground up.

Man, talk about influence. As you know, one of the major themes of Daniel is influence. We've been getting into that over the last month. Influence has a positive and a negative aspect to it. On the negative side, the question is, "How do we keep from getting influenced by Babylon?" Right? Or, in this case, by Portland. How do we keep from getting sucked in?

But, on the positive side, the question is, "Okay, how do we actually exert influence in a Kingdom of God, Jesusy way, over Babylon or over the city that we live in and call home?"

Now, I just want to say a few more things about influence from the story before we talk about the major theme of this chapter, which is "Witness."

So, first off, make sure you get the difference between power and influence. Power is top down. It's based on your position. It's the ability to coerce; to make people do what you want them to do even if it's against their will. And honestly, followers of Jesus, people in general have never really done well with power. But, influence, on the other hand, is similar but different. It's center out. It's based not on your position, but on your person; on who you are. It's the ability not to coerce, but to convince; to make people want to do what you want them to of their own free will and volition.

Influence is what an artist has, what a writer has, what a celebrity, for better or worse, has. It's what Martin Luther King Jr. had. It's what Harriet Beecher Stowe had. And it's influence that we're after, not power, as followers of Jesus.

Second, I just want you to remember from a few weeks ago, Alex made a great point that very few of us get to influence Culture with a capital "C." But, all of us get to influence cultures. Here's what we mean by that: most of us, myself included, will have little or no influence on the culture of Portland, much less the culture of the U.S. or the Western world. The seminal book on this, if you want to read it more, is "To Change the World" by James Davison Hunter. There's only about 10 of you in the room that need to read that book, but you all need to own it, underline it, star it, know it really well.

The basic premise is that the world is not changed – or, if you prefer, culture is not shaped – by the masses. We want to think that in democracy. "If we just change everybody's heart and mind the world will change." But, that's just not how it goes. The world is changed and culture is shaped by what Hunter – and I hate the language here – calls "elites." Usually men and women from money, highly educated, well-placed in society, really good at whatever it is that they do who play key rolls in culture, politics, education, business, the arts.

Hunter's classic example – and he's a believer – is the LGBT community. The gay population is, we think, 1.7 or 1.8% of the U.S. population. The entire LGBTQ community maybe 3 or 4%. Yet, in two or three decades, really in two decades, they entirely changed public opinion from moral to immoral; from what was unthinkable even when I was a little kid in the 80s is now unthinkable to be on the other side. And it was changed not by the masses. The masses were changed by the elites. Intentional, highly placed, educated people in society.

So, culture – this is kind of depressing if you're not famous – is not shaped by me or by most of you. It's shaped by elites. But, here's the thing: we all have some kind of a reach; some kind of influence. To our family, to our friends. If you're a mom or dad, then to your children; to the people that you work with in your office. The people that you live by, the people across the hall from you. To frame it up another way, it's like we all have a sphere of influence. Most of us have a really small sphere of influence. And that's just, I don't mean that – it just is. But then, some people have a huge, kind of wide, national or even global sphere of influence.

There's a famous journalist and non-fiction writer that I love. I've been reading his stuff for years and he's not been a follower of Jesus, but I just found out that he became a disciple of Jesus. He's on the east coast. He joined my friend's church. He's there. He's in community. The odds are – my friend's church is, I don't know, maybe a couple thousand people. The odds are that one man will have more influence on their city, on our nation and on the world than the rest of that church all put together. That's just the way it works.

So, what does this mean for you and me as a creative minority here at Bridgetown? Well, first off, it means that a few of you need to become – and we all hate the language – elites if we want to actually change this culture and change this city from the ground up. Not in a power trip way, but if you actually want to have influence, if we as a community want to have influence, then some of you – maybe it's just five or ten of you, but we need you to live into your vocation, to your God-given identity and calling.

So many young people here tonight. Some of you need to go get your PhD and come back and be the head of the philosophy department at PSU. Some of you need to go to the east coast, go to Harvard, get your law degree, come back, start a practice and, when you're 40, run for mayor. Somebody needs to write a novel or make the next Chance the Rapper record. Just do it, will you? Please? And play for us and stay and hang with us and all of that kind of stuff. All that to say, whatever dream it is that God has put in the back of your heart and the back of your mind, no matter how crazy, please, please, please chase after it. We are behind you. Most of us aren't called to that. But, if you are, we are behind you 110% of the way.

And then the rest of us need to pool our collective influence and leverage it for the Kingdom of God in our city. We need to cross-pollinate the sectors of society we all work in. Government, education, the arts, business, medicine. Each of us work and, at times, working together. Not for power; not to Christianize our city, but to influence our city with Jesus' vision of human flourishing, because we believe that's the best for everybody involved. In the language of the Prophet Jeremiah that the whole creative minority idea comes from, to seek the peace and the prosperity of the city to which I have called you in exile.

And, for those of you who want to grow in influence and you're thinking, "Alright. How? I have no idea."

We'll look at three components, really fast, of Daniel's life. Excellence, character, faithfulness. So, first off is this idea of excellence in your vocation. Look again at verse 3.

Daniel 6:3: "Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the chief ministers and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."

"Exceptional qualities" there means his work ethic, his skill, his talent, his ability to do his job well.

"At this, the chief priests and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel..."

Remember that line from back in chapter 1: **"In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned Daniel and his friends, he found them ten times better than all of the magicians and the enchanters in his whole kingdom."**

So, the reason that Daniel rose to influence in Babylon wasn't just because of God's favor, it was because he was dang good at his job. If you want to influence culture, you have to be really, really good at whatever it is you do. Raising kids, teaching high school science, writing poetry, running a business, a hip-hop record, whatever your thing is. You have to become a craftsman, a maestro, a scholar, an expert in your field, a guru, like, really, really good at whatever it is you do even if it takes a lifetime to get there.

This is a deeply biblical idea that runs all the way through. I think of that famous line in Ecclesiastes: "Whatever your hand finds to do," – you know the second line? – "do it with all your might."

Whatever your hand finds to do. So, big or small. You're like a freshman in college and it's algebra class or you're the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, which you're not here because you'd be tithing and we would know. But, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Do it with passion and love and sweet equity and craft. That takes years, if not decades, to get really good at your work. That famous – Malcolm Gladwell made it famous – 10,000 hours number from study after study every day, just put in your hours to become a craftsman or a craftswoman.

One of my favorite non-fiction writers is this guy named Cal Newport. He named one of his books after a Steve Martin quote. "Be So Good They Can't Ignore You." The reality is, when you're really good at whatever it is you do, whether it's your job, whether you get paid for it or not, it's not your job at all, it's something you do as a part of your life, your ministry, your mission, whatever. When you're really good at whatever it is, people take notice and you grow in influence.

Secondly: depth of character. Look again at Daniel 6:4: **"At this, the chief ministers and satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent."**

I love that. Some people are not corrupt. Like, they have great integrity. But, they're kind of just late for everything and irresponsible and they drop the ball all the time. Other people are like on it and 10 minutes early and they have the excel spreadsheet right there. But, they're just kind of seedy and ambitious and lame or whatever. Not Daniel. I just love that line. Not corrupt nor negligent.

So, imagine this. Imagine if the FBI and the CIA and TMZ all vet you and all scrutinize every square inch of your life from top to bottom and come up with nothing. "We got nothing. This girl's character is impeccable."

If you want to influence culture, you don't have to be perfect. But, you do have to back up excellence in your vocation with a life that makes people stop and pay attention. Because, at the end of the day, character is destiny. Your character will catch up to you at some point. If there's a gap between your public life and your private life, between your excellence at your job or your work or whatever it is you do, and your character, it's only a matter of time until you go Ryan however you pronounce his last name. It came out. Just a crazy story this week. What is it, 19 Olympic gold medals and he gets drunk and he's vandalizing a gas station and then lying about it? We will never remember him for his 19 gold medals ever. We will remember him from that stupid Liar, Liar 2 thing. Remember that that you see online? Have you not seen that? Do you read the news? Don't you guys read the news? Nobody reads the news. Alright. Okay. I don't watch the Olympics, but I read the news.

Anyway, that's all we'll remember him for. It's only a matter of time and your character is your destiny. We live in this age of moral ambiguity in the West. Starting with the enlightenment and leading up the last half century we've thrown off external authority (God, the Bible, Church, tradition, mom and dad) and now we're left with nothing but internal authority meaning the self. The self is not the arbiter of what's right and wrong. Our personal feelings. And, if you've read Genesis 3, it's the exact same story played out now across the West. Think of that ubiquitous advice: be true to yourself. Never mind that's actually a quote from Hamlet from I forget the guys name, but the fool who follows that advice and destroys his life and everybody around him. Like, we forget where that actually came from.

In the past, you know, your feelings about right and wrong were, at best, suspect. Your desires were to be kept in check and not just let run wild. David Brooks, in his masterful book "The Road to Character," makes the point that every great society in history, including early America, was built around the pursuit of virtue, not the pursuit of happiness. Back in the day, that was kind of the same thing. They all had some kind of a moral and spiritual authority; some kind of frame of reference. But, in the U.S., we've lost that over the last half century since the war. We no longer have, in Brooks' language, "A strategy to build character."

We don't have a moral or a spiritual framework or any kind of authority. He makes this great point: unless if you're Aristotle, most of us can't come up with one from scratch by the time we're 16. Most of us just can't do that. All of this leads to an amoral society which usually means immoral which means what? Which means that character sticks out more now than ever before. Be like Jesus. Be a man or woman of integrity, honesty, humility, put the needs of others above your own, be kind, be faithful, don't jump around, don't be flakey, show up on time, don't cancel via text. Whatever the thing is. Just stick to it, be a good husband or father, be a good mom, be a good child, handle money well, Sabbath. Just basic human wisdom and you will do well.

Third – and I'm running out of time – is faithfulness. As we said in verse 1, Daniel is upwards of 70 or 80 years old. He's lived through the rise and fall of two empires and at least three or four kings and he's still at it. You want to influence our city or the people around you or your kids or the world, you have to be faithful over the long haul. We all know this, but our generation we want it all right now. We grew up on the microwave and email and TV on demand and Amazon Prime and all of it. We're so used to the world at our fingertips.

The problem is some things, like technology, will never be able to speed up. Character, relationships, a healthy marriage, parenting, legacy, excellence or skill in your job, your work or whatever it is you do. This stuff takes not years, it takes decades. It takes a lifetime. What Cal Newport calls "deliberate practice." Just everyday you're at it and you're faithful.

I love that line in Hebrews: "Imitate those who, through faith and patience, inherit what has been promised." That word "faith" in both Greek, it's pistis, and in Hebrew as well can also be translated "faithfulness." To have faith is to be faithful. Faithful in all the dimensions of your life. Faithful to God to stay true, to not get sucked into compromise. To not assimilate into our city that we love but is just like a siren. Faithfulness to your community, your spouse if you have one, your family, those that you're in relationship with, your church. Faithfulness to God's calling on your life just to stay. Do not underestimate the power of quiet faithfulness over a lifetime.

So, if you want to grow in influence, there's no formula, but here's how: excellence, character, faithfulness. Now, that said, Daniel isn't just about influence in general, but a very specific kind of influence for the Kingdom of God. So, you have this theme of influence that runs all the way through the book. But then, each chapter kind of teases out a unique angel. So, chapter 1 it's compromise, chapter 2 it's calling, chapter 3 was non-participation if you remember that, chapter 4, last week with Chris, was this idea of resistance.

So, what's this chapter's unique contribution? Well, it's this idea of witness. And I know that's like odd language. But, it's really, I think, appropriate. Daniel is a witness to Yahweh, the one true creator God, right in the thick of Babylon. Everybody knows that Daniel is a worshiper of Yahweh. His boss, the king, knows. His coworkers know. His neighbors know. There's no bullhorn in this story. Like, Daniel's not on the street corner. There's no tattoo of John 3:16 – it hadn't been written yet – or the great Shema or whatever. There's no sandwich board sign. There's no social media hashtag. But, in whatever appropriate, subtle, classy way, Daniel's witness to Yahweh is not private; it is public. It is out there and everybody knows that man is a man of Yahweh.

What about you? Could the same be said about you? Could the same be said about me? I don't mean here. Most of you kind of get that I follow Jesus. But, what about my neighbors? What about my friends that aren't a part of our community? What about the other dads from the soccer team this fall as we start back up? Is word out to your coworkers, your boss, the girl you sit next to in class, the guy across the hall from your apartment, your family, your extended family. Do people know you as a follower of Jesus?

You know, I feel like our generation has lost its passion for evangelism. Even saying that word just makes me feel not cool. Like, it's just weird. It's old school language. It's not in vogue. It's not hip anymore. All that word means, all evangelism means, is to preach the Gospel. Or, in today's language, to tell people about Jesus. This is a central part of what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus of Nazareth. You tell other people about Jesus. You just tell the Jesus story that we're going to start reading Tuesday morning.

You know, two reasons I think we've lost ground in this area: one is the post-Christian moment that we're in. People don't want anything to do with faith in the public square. It's just kind of like believe whatever you want. "You want to believe in Jesus or the force or the flying spaghetti monster? Whatever. That's fine. Just keep it to yourself. Okay? Don't drag it into work. Don't drag it into the classroom. Just keep it to yourself."

Not to mention HR and all the rules and regulations in the workplace and that's a nightmare. Not for me. I work at a church. But, for most of you. So, we just feel this overwhelming emotional and social pressure to just, "Dude, just shut up. Go to church. Keep it to yourself."

Then you have the Christian moment. A lot of the old ways of preaching the Gospel or telling people about Jesus just don't work that well anymore. The classic evangelism event from when I was kid with a Christian band as the draw that no non-believer has ever heard of or would ever listen to because they're not that good and 95+% of the people at the evangelism event are already saved or whatever. That actually worked at one point. One of our elders got saved that way. One of the best men I know. But, a lot less so now.

Or door to door evangelism. Can you imagine? Oh my gosh. I was talking to my dad – he's old. He's great. But, he was telling me he started as a pastor in the late 1970s and every Sunday, if you were new to the church, you'd fill out a "new to the church card" and drop it in the offering thing or whatever. The next morning my dad and all the other pastors in

a suit and tie would go to your house, knock on your door, say, "Can we come in and have coffee and talk to you about Jesus?"

Can you imagine if I did that to you tomorrow morning? It's like 7 a.m. and Gerald and I are there like, "Hey, we have some Stumptown for you. Can we talk to you about Jesus?" You would call the police. You'd be like, "Stalker. What is wrong with you? Invasion of privacy. This is so Snowden. It's not okay."

The world has changed. Plus, there's all sorts of lame, weird, cheesy stuff. You have the "tract" method of evangelism. Like, you think you see a hundred-dollar bill and you're like, "Yes!" and you reach down and it's like, "If you were to die tonight..."

"Come on! Come on. That's just so not cool at all."

You know? Or you have the guy with the sandwich board sign with "Hell" on the front and "Hillary Clinton" on the other side or something. So, we're so turned off by evangelism done bad by, "If you were to die tonight," by the cheesy thing, by the angry person on TV or whatever, that we just throw out the baby with the bath water and we just don't preach the Gospel at all anymore.

I was reading this blog from this – I don't normally read blogs. But, I was reading this one from somebody I'd never even heard of, this millennial girl, and she just had this great thing to say about our generation.

"As we establish ourselves firmly in the 21st century, tent revivals and traveling evangelists have become things of the past taught in history classes and portrayed in movies. Evangelism is often presented as an old school, out of style idea with little value or relevance in our fast paced, urban world. The reality is that social media platforms and trendy wall plaques are inundated with quotes preaching the idea of easy evangelism. If we just live good enough lives, we can forego the conversation entirely and people around us will almost magically come to know Jesus through our good actions and selfless character.

"This style of evangelism..." – I love this – "...is becoming more and more prevalent in a culture constantly looking for the fast track and simple fix. But, if we believe God has called us to preach the Gospel to all nations and all people, we must call the next generation back to a commitment to evangelism."

Every generation is just one generation deep. You know that. If we don't pass it on, and not only to our children but to our city, if we don't not make converts to Christianity, but make disciples of Jesus, then the church in our city and in our nation will die. Then we will die. To preach the Gospel is to talk about Jesus. That infamous misquote of Saint Francis of Assisi that we don't even think is legitimate at all and, even if it is, it's wrong: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel and, if necessary, use words."

Love that idea. It's totally ridiculous and dumb. That's like, the Gospel is, by definition, good news. That's what the word means. Good news. That's like saying, "Go into the living room and tell somebody the daily news and, if necessary, use words."

Like, what is that? Charades or something? That's not how it works at all. The Gospel is, by definition, good news. One that we have to preach, that we have to get out, that we have to talk about. You don't have to knock on somebody's door and be weird. You don't have to scream. You don't need a bullhorn. It's about relationship. It's about humility. It's about listening. All of that. You know me well. But, it is Gospel. It is good news.

And this is scary to do in exile. You know, I've been thinking about it. Just all my family was gone all week long. They got back this afternoon. So, I was alone all week and just had plenty of time to read and think and pray. I was really struck by this last night. I was coming home late last night on my bike from the last ever Showbread concert, which was so punk rock. It was fun. So, I'm riding through the city over the river and it's late at night and I don't normally go out late Saturday night. I don't "club" or anything. You know? I mean, once in a while when Tammy's like, "Gotta go crazy!" But, not most of the time.

So, I'm just out and I'm riding through the city and it's late and I'm just struck – it's summer and a lot of people are out – by just the pornification of our culture and how far gone our city is into secularism. I've been reading some interesting literature last week and just thinking about how depressing the secular worldview is and to become your own God; to become your own moral and spiritual authority is really a dead end. I don't know if you

guys saw that interesting article in the Willamette Weekly this last week about scathing indictment of a Bible study on a public school campus at an elementary school.

I'm like, "Gosh. I hope we don't make the paper."

There's this just really depressing line from a teacher about how "we work hard all day long and this Bible study's undermining everything we teach the kids about science and truth with superstition." I just thought, that's what people – they think that we're superstitious. "You believe that Jesus is back from the dead and that the Kingdom of God is here and that Jesus was humanity and divinity in the same place? Do you believe in Tinker Bell too?"

That's how people think about the way of Jesus in our city. It's just so – even being alone all week I was just thinking, in the pornification of our culture, what it's like for so many of you that are single just to stay faithful to God. Man, you are so, we are so swimming upstream in our culture against the flow of all this emotional weight. And there's no lions' den, thank God, in Pioneer Courthouse Square. We're not under threat of death. There's no persecution here. It's more like a soft discrimination, an emotional pressure, a social pressure to just let it go and just be like everybody else. "Be normal, alright?"

And we live under the weight of that every single day. And the call to Jesus is not only to be faithful, but to be fruitful; to be a witness. We all hate the idea of proselytizing, but listen, there's a myth out there that Christians are the only ones who proselytize. That is so ridiculous. Everybody is proselytizing. This is America. What's that book? "To Be Human is to Sell." Everybody is hocking something. Preaching the Gospel of Jesus or the gospel of Stranger Things or the gospel of the new Frank Ocean record or the gospel of money or the gospel of sexual freedom or the gospel of minimalism or the gospel of more stuff or the gospel of whatever your thing is. Everybody is out there preaching something and selling something. The only difference between them and us is we have the best news on offer. We have Jesus. The one thing, the one person, the one relationship, the one reality that does not let you down at the end of the day.

And even in a secular city like Portland, people are hungry and thirsty for God. Even if they don't realize that's what the appetite is for, they think it's for more money or more success or more fame or more sex or more romance or more whatever. But, down at the bottom of the soul, we cannot escape the fact that human beings were made in the image of God, made for relationship with God, created, born, hardwired by the maker of the universe for relationship with God.

How that happened, how many years ago that happened, I don't even care. But, I know that I was made and so was every other man and woman and child on our planet. We know this. We have this good news. We have this Gospel. And our job, as a creative minority, is to be a witness to Jesus in our city. You don't need to go buy a bullhorn tomorrow. You don't need to come up with a new hashtag. You don't even need to wear a bad shirt. But, you need to be known in public and in private as an apprentice of Jesus of Nazareth. Somebody who believe that Jesus is the King and the Kingdom of God is here and it's all that matters in the end. And we need to believe for our friends and our family and our neighbors and people we love and care about, we need to believe for salvation.

I had a great talk with a friend of mine who's not a follower of Jesus. We talked for about three hours a few weeks ago about the Gospel of Jesus. An amazing topic. Kept expecting him to get mad at me and he kept nodding his head. "Yeah. Yeah." It was this amazing God moment. And I was so inspired after but also convicted because I realized I had zero hope for this guy to come to faith in Jesus. Just nothing. I mean, great guy, but smart and a little older than I am, wealthy, hyper-educated, super secularized. I just had zero hope. At the end of that conversation, my eyes started to open. "Oh my gosh. God is at work in this guy's life. God is actually speaking to this man. He's open."

And I had zero faith for it at all. So, who do you have faith for? Is there a name? Is there a face that comes to mind right now? Who do you believe for? Who's God called you to to be a witness? May you, like Daniel, unflinching, with humility, with poise, with grace, with relationship, may you be a witness to the God of everything. Let's stand and pray.