

Sermon Transcript from September 11th, 2016
Outro: Daniel vs. the Modern World
Pastor John Mark Comer, Bridgetown Church

Tonight, we are wrapping up our summer series, "Life in Exile: On Becoming a Creative Minority," and we really feel like the ideas in this series are a paradigm that we want to frame our future together as a community for years, if not decades, to come. So tonight, we want to do something that we've never done before. At the risk of boring you, I want to recap our series over the last summer. So, summer's over. Sad face emoji right now. The odds are, it's Portland summer, that you missed one or two of the teachings for vacation or whatever. And, even if you're up to date on the podcast, I still really want the ideas that we've been getting after to sink in to the depth of our community.

So, the plan is to recap for not a long time. But, I don't know, 10 or 15 minutes, and then I have a few new ideas to tie it all off and then I think we'll wrap up tonight with prayer. Does that sound like a map for our time together? I might make it five minutes.

So, we are living in a new cultural moment. Over the last two or three hundred years, ever since the enlightenment, but really in the last two or three decades in the U.S., at least at a popular level, the ground underneath our feet has shifted. We've moved from a Christianized culture where the culture was a mixture of Christian ideas and pagan and then, later, secular ideas, to what social critics call a "post-Christian" culture. We're living at the tail end of three shifts across our nation and, really, across the West.

The first if from a majority to a minority. So, for the first time ever, followers of Jesus in the U.S. are a minority. From the center to the fringe. So, there was a time when followers of Jesus were at the center of power and influence all over our nation. But, that time has long since gone the way of the earth. As a general rule, people want nothing to do with faith in the public square. Then, from well respect to disrespected. So, the odds are that your neighbor, your coworker, your boss, when people hear, "Oh, you're a Christian," or, "Oh, you're an apprentice of Jesus of Nazareth," people actually have a negative view of you because of that. That you're thought of as "dangerous" in our kind of semi-illiterate society. You're lumped in right together with ISIS and the Orlando shooting and cyber-bullying and everything that's wrong, not right, with the world.

This is the moment that we're living in, and Portland is a great example of this nationwide secularization. As one of the top post-Christian cities in America, it's kind of a canary in the coal mine for the trajectory that the U.S. as a whole is on. I don't know if you saw this a few weeks ago. I thought it was fascinating. So, this is a new podcast that is making waves. So, on iTunes, in the religion and spirituality category, which is like the mega-podcast category, usually the top 10 are all Christian.

So, Joel Osteen is pretty much always number one. Like, you just tell people they're awesome every single minute and it does well. Then you have other great people up there. You have Tim Keller and Rick Warren and Joyce Meyer and all of that. The top 10 are, for the most part, all Christian. But, a few weeks ago, there was this bombshell moment when a new podcast bumped out Osteen for the number one spot. That just does not happen. And it's this podcast, "Harry Potter and the Sacred Text."

So, here's the blurb from iTunes. I'm not making this up. Here it is:

"What if we read the books we love as if they were sacred texts? What would we learn? How might they change us? Harry Potter and the Sacred Text is a podcast reading Harry Potter, the best-selling series of all time, as if it was a sacred text. Just as Christians read the Bible, Jews the Torah, and Muslims read the Quran, we will read Harry Potter not just as novels, but as instructive and inspirational text that will teach us about our own lives."

So, it's easy to obviously laugh it off as yet another example of Harry Potter mania and there's all sorts of buzz in the air and number eight and all of that stuff. But, the reality is we're living in a cultural moment where a lot of people are more interested in reading Harry Potter as a sacred text than reading the Bible as inspired by the Spirit of God. Now, in a moment like these, there are, I think, at least three options for the church now that we are a minority in a culture where the values of the majority run alien or even hostile to the way of Jesus.

The first option is separatism. So, we just buy a piece of property out in eastern Oregon, we move out, we buy a goat farm and churn our own butter and we do our thing. Right? You, me. Every morning it's like, "That butter was great."

"But, I'm vegan!"

Whatever. That's our thing. This is what I call the "Christian as adjective" posture where you wake up in the morning and you go to a Christian coffee shop and you sit at a Christian bookstore and you're listening to Christian music and you put your kids into a Christian school and you have a Christian dentist and a Christian orthodontist and a Christian therapist and everything. And that's not all bad at all. But, it is kind of that posture of, "Let's get away from it all."

Now, the other posture that's far more of a problem in a city – we laugh at that, because it's really not an issue for 99% of you. One that is far more of a problem in a city like Portland is that of syncretism. We just cave in and assimilate and kind of go with the flow and update the teachings of Jesus to fit with the late modern, western worldview and ethic and all of that.

But, a better way forward is this third option. It's the idea of a creative minority. This is a phrase coined by the late historian, Arnold Toynbee, and his work on the rise and fall of empires and then made popular by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. The basic idea is that a group of people on the fringe of culture – so, a minority. An ethnic minority, religious minority or whatever – who rather than default to separatism ("let's get away") or syncretism ("let's give in") are creative and together, as a community, they work for the good for the healing and the renewal of the wider culture that is in decline.

Now, this is a paradigm based on Jeremiah's letter to Daniel and his friends in Babylon. If you remember that line, we read it the first week in the series: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have called you into exile. Because if it prospers, you too will..." – what? – "...prosper."

And that letter, that idea, became the paradigm for Daniel and then for the people of God down through human history. Now, our series was inspired by a very similar one by my friend John Tyson in New York City, and I love his definition of a creative minority.

"A Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships..." – I love that – "...knotted together in a living network of persons..." – so, this isn't an idea or an ideology; it's a community – "...in a complex and challenging cultural setting..." – like the one we're in – "...who are committed [all in] to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world."

But, here's the problem: to live in the middle, to straddle the knife's edge between separatism and syncretism is not easy. Jonathan Sacks said it this way in his fantastic little write up on the First Thing's blog:

"To become a creative minority is not easy because it involves maintaining strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith, seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning, but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part. This is, as Jews can testify, a demanding and risk-laden choice."

And we said that the metaphor in the Bible that best captures this kind of a moment that we're in now is that of exile. So, enter Daniel. I honestly believe, in particular now after the last two months in it, there is no better book, for sure in all of the Old Testament, if not in all of the Bible, for how to live in exile than Daniel.

I know that back in January in our series on the Bible if you were here, we said over and over again that the Bible is not a collection of short stories that teach a moral lesson. Most of the characters in the Bible are anything but heroes. The Bible is brutally honest about failure and pride, violence, war, genocide, adultery, immorality, doubt. All of it is in there. There's no filter. There's little or no propaganda. But, that said, Daniel is the exception to the rule, and hopefully you've been picking up on that over the last few weeks. He is, very much, a hero. The point of Daniel isn't just to tell us about Israel's life in exile, but to give you and me, millennia later as the people of God, a paradigm for how we live in a time of exile.

So, from Daniel, we hit on seven ideas over the last few months over the summer. The first was this idea of compromise. In chapter 1, we saw Babylon's strategy to influence

Daniel through isolation, inculturation, integration and identification. Do you remember that? His name was changed. But, there's that key line: "Daniel determined in his heart not to defile himself with the royal food and wine."

We talked about the difference between hard power and soft power. Hard power is ISIS. You know? "Convert to Islam or we cut off your head." Soft power is Portland. "How about another round? Hey, just watch a little Orange is the New Black. It's late. You're tired. You had a long week. Hey, you love her. He loves you. Just mess around a little bit. It's all good. Everybody's doing it."

Portland is an example par excellence of soft power. We live under this constant, 24/7 pressure to compromise; to just chill out, relax, go with the flow, hold that one little detail back from your sales pitch, buy that jacket you don't need that was made based on injustice, have another drink, visit that site, whatever the thing is. What happens is that, over a long period of time, sin will – and this is especially the "small sins" that sneak in under the radar – numb and cool and dead our heart and mind to the voice of the Holy Spirit. We slowly die off spiritually.

The call of a creative minority is to live a life of no compromise. Secondly was this idea of calling. In chapter 2, we saw Daniel's strategy to influence Babylon. We made the point that the main way that we influence culture is through our work. And Daniel put on display the four kind of magical components of culture; how you and I grow in cultural influence. Excellence of vocation. He was really, really good at his job. Depth of character. I mean, the dude was just top shelf, stand up, impeccable character. Faithfulness. He was at it for a very long time; through the highs, through the lows over six decades of life. And finally, witness. It was crystal clear to everybody: "That man is a follower of the one true God."

And that's how we grow in cultural influence as a creative minority. Excellence in vocation. Depth of character. Faithfulness. Witness.

Then, third, was this idea of non-participation. In chapter 3, we read that story about the statue of gold symbolic for Babylon, the nation-state, and all of Babylon is there. It's kind of a civil religion to bow down. But, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are there and basically just say, "Sorry. No."

And we talked about how there's an impulse in every single nation-state, in particular in a great one, to elevate your country and your country's way of life to the place of a de facto god in your heart and your mind. But, there comes a time for a follower of Jesus when you and I just have to say, "No. I'm sorry, but I just can't participate in that. Go ahead, but not me. I'm out. Everybody's bowing down. I know. Everybody's worshipping. I get it. But, I will not bow down and I will not worship."

Then our fourth idea was this idea of "resistance" from chapter 4. The story of Daniel. Remember that? Standing up against Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man, literally, in the world. And standing up against Nebuchadnezzar not on behalf of sexuality or whatever, but on behalf of injustice; those in his kingdom that were under the boot of oppression. And we said that there are times when non-participation isn't enough; when you and I have to ratchet it up a notch or two or three to a creative, non-violent resistance, in particular on issues of injustice. So, we used the example of racial tension in our nation right now. It's not enough to simply not be racist, especially if you are white or, in the language of Ta-Nehisi Coates, if you think that you are white. I'm still trying to figure out what he means by that, but I know it's good. That we need to come together with the black community to break the bond of systemic racism in our country.

So, then we got into this idea after that of witness. It's not just about justice and all of that. In chapter 6, an elderly Daniel – we think 70 or 80 years old – is put into the lions' den all because he refused not to pray in public for one month; for 30 days. That's it. For Daniel, that was worth dying over. Faith was meant to be lived in public and not just in private. And everybody knew that Daniel was a worshiper of Yahweh. His boss knew, his coworker knew, his neighborhood knew. It was out there. And we asked the question, "Do people around you – your neighbor, your coworker, your roommate, your cousin, your aunt, your uncle, your boss – know, not in a weird, sandwich board sign, fake 100-dollar bill tract, lame kind of way, but do people know that you are a follower of Jesus? Is your life, your character, your budget, your marriage, all that you are, an imperfect, but yet a good, healthy witness to the reality of the one true God?"

Then we got into this idea next of empire. In chapter 7, we read Daniel's dream – or,

really, it's more like a nightmare – of four beasts coming out of the sea, each of which was symbolic for an empire. And we see that America, as great as she is, is an empire, and empire's are rarely the friend of the people of God and usually the enemy. So, we talked about, "What does it look like for you and I as the Church to live under the shadow of empire as a creative minority? To live kind of right in the middle of our nation, our empire, but yet to live for the Kingdom of God?"

Then, last week, Bethany brought it all home with this idea of "hope" from chapter 12. It's easy, in a time like right now, to give up hope. Right? There's just not a ton of other followers of Jesus in our city. More and more people are saying that America, and really all of the West, is in decline with the rise of Islam, war through the Middle East, the financial crisis of 2008, the gap between the rich and poor is getting worse, not better. The polarization of the right and the left. And I'm no futurist or expert on the subject, but I think we all agree that it's a mess right now and it's easy to give up hope for the Kingdom of God to come in Portland as it is in heaven. But, hope is the backbone of a creative minority. Hope for the future, for the coming of the Kingdom of God one day out there no the horizon with Jesus as King and everything in our city and our society and our generation and our world is as it should be.

But, not just hope for the future. Also hope for the here and now. That God, in the present, is up to something in our city and that you and I, as followers of Jesus, get to be a part of it. Now, recap over. Are you still alive? Are you good? That was like 15 minutes. Not bad. I don't know if we'll ever do that again. But, just to drive – you're a teacher, right, Dan? There's something about repetition. Right? I forgot what it was. But, there's something about repetition.

Now, before we wind down, I want to set aside a few minutes to talk about what Daniel has to say to the modern world. And I'll do my best here. Because, we don't live in Babylon in the sixth century B.C., obviously. We live in Portland in 2016. So, there's a lot of continuity and a lot of discontinuity between the world of Daniel and the world that you and I call home. There are a number of challenges we face here in Portland that are unique to our time and place. And I'm sure we could all make a list. But, as I've been thinking and praying about this for the last few months, here's what I think – John Mark's opinion – are the top three that I just want to lay out for you and then we'll kind of move on from there.

The first is hyper-individualism. We live in what is hands down the most individualistic generation ever. Ever. And this is especially true in Portland. End of the Oregon Trail, destination spot for the outlaw or pioneer or homesteader or tracker or hunter, Lewis and Clark, the image of the lone cowboy coming over Mount Hood all alone. But, it's not just a Portland problem. It's an epidemic across the West. The sociologist, Robert Putnam, in his well known book, *Bowling Alone*, writes about how architecture is a sign of culture shifts. So, I could give a whole teaching at some point on the five types of church architecture down through Western European history that are symbolic for five moments in the church in Western European history. And he points out that – and, of course, this is less true in an urban context than a suburban context, but still – we don't build front porches anymore. We build back decks. That is actually a deeply symbolic sign of where our culture is at. Our world has changed.

The pollster, Michale Adam, writes about "a winding journey from the death of God and the traditional notions of family and community to a highly individualistic population focused on personal control and autonomy to a new embryonic but fast-growing sense of human interconnectedness with technology and nature."

But, as we all know, this interconnectedness of social media and Instagram story and Facebook, it's kind of a myth or, at least, a facade. Interconnectedness is not the same thing as community. Tremper Longman, an Old Testament scholar, writing on Daniel, has this to say:

"The God of modern culture is not the God of the Bible," – and I love this point – "but it is ultimately the self."

Meaning idolatry in the West, most of us are not tempted to go worship Zeus or Thor, although he is super hot. But, that's not the temptation for most of us. It's to worship, to kind of bow down to the self. This strange god demands worship that creates values different from those of Christianity. Since the individual is at the heart of the worship of secular culture, personal gratification and self-realization are prized over any sense of the other person, any sense of community, whether that community is the family, the church, the city, the nation or the global community.

And this, I think you would agree, is a huge challenge for the Church, in particular in a city like Portland. Because, the Church is, by definition, a community. Yet, for a lot of people, it's pulling teeth to get them to move from Sunday to a community; from sitting in a pew to sitting around a table. I think my greatest fear is that the Church is more like an airplane than a family. Like, an airplane is a weird social experiment. Right? I was just on one a few days ago and I'm hyper-introverted and all of that. It's so weird. I'm a follower of Jesus – this is so embarrassing to admit – but I literally sit down, noise cancelling headphones are already on before I'm on just in case there's an extrovert next door or whatever. Already on and I sit down and Chance the Rapper or whatever is already there and I downloaded it on my phone so I'm good to go. I immediately open up my laptop and I start to work and I just do this.

I mean, you spend hours next to a person and you never even meet the man or meet the woman unless if they're a dang extrovert. Dang you. Dang you. But, whatever. So, I think my fear is that Church is more like an airplane where you're here with hundreds of other people and you sit next to somebody that you don't even know or maybe there's a quick, awkward, "Hi," during the four minutes, which is like the church equivalent of the weird video with the safety procedure thing or whatever. But then it's like, "Okay. Praise God that's over." Pretending I'm taking notes or whatever. Then we go on this journey together for a few hours and then we're done and then you walk off and you go about your life.

Rather than the Church is actually a family. It's a group of people – and I know there's a lot of people here, so maybe this is more like a tribe than a family. But, it's a family of people that are in relationship with each other and love each other. Not just in the token, "Oh, I love you," but actually do life together. So, this is a huge challenge for you, in the hyper-individualism of our day and age, to do more than an event on Sunday night, but to do family as the people of God.

Secondly, I think the next huge challenge we face is this idea of anti-authoritarianism. Our city is practically allergic to authority. Right? Cascadia, anybody? Why would we secede from the union? Whatever. But, once again, it's not just a Portland thing. Our nation was built on rebellion against authority. So, the Revolutionary War against King George. The famous line: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."

Like, it's in our DNA. But, it's not just an American thing, either. I mean, it's a particular, acute issue here. But, it's a Western thing. Charles Taylor, who's a famous sociologist, I believe he's dead now, but his book on secularism, on how the west became secular, is kind of the seminal work at an academic level. It's called "The Secular Age." It's like 1,000 pages. He opens his book with this question:

"Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000, many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"

Meaning, in 500 years, how did we go from a world where atheism was pretty much non-existent to a world where, no matter how devout you are in your faith – pastor, community leader, apprentice of Jesus – we're all kind of racked by doubt, cynicism, skepticism and "what if?" How did that happen in our society? He writes about the shift all over the West from what he calls a "culture of authority." This was really helpful for me. A culture of authority where your moral and spiritual authority was external. So, it was located in God or in the Bible or in the Church or in tradition or in parents or your tribe to what he calls a "culture of authenticity" where your plumb line for right and wrong is internal; it's located in the self. And you are the authority. What you think, what you feel, is the arbiter of right and wrong. The Oprah-esque mantra of, "Be true to yourself."

He writes this:

"The understanding of life, which emerges with the romantic expressiveism of the late 18th century, that each one of us has his or her own way of realizing our humanity and that it is important to find and live out one's own as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside by society or the previous generation by religious or political authority."

Meaning – if I lost you there – it used to be that we were raised in a culture that had a vision of the good life based on some kind of an external authority source. Usually, in the West, that was at least kind, sort of, the Bible, the Church tradition, all of that. And you were raised by your parents and by the Church and by society and even by the government to live into that vision. But now, any kind of external authority source is thought of as coercive

and controlling. So, we're all about freedom and we've redefined freedom in the late modern West from freedom from to freedom to. Meaning it's not enough anymore to have freedom from tyranny (Nazi Germany or communist Russia), we want freedom from everything. Freedom from God, freedom from religion, freedom from a moral ethic or a spiritual framework, freedom from mom and dad and grandma and grandpa and a generation before us. We just want a blank canvas to kind of paint our own life from scratch. "Nobody has the right to tell me how to live."

David Brooks, in his masterpiece book, *The Road to Character*, makes the point that this is great if you're Aristotle. But, most of us can't come up with a moral and spiritual framework by the time we're 13 from scratch. We have to be raised into some kind of a vision of the good life. As a result, our society is growing more and more amoral, which often turns out to be immoral. So, I don't know if you saw the Pamela Anderson and her little op-ed on pornography and how it's ruining the West. Then I was reading this fascinating – I forget what it was, but it was like a little hipster culture blogpost site, and I was reading this argument against her. It was an argument for pornography. This author kept – he was arguing why pornography was a good thing – using the phrase, "This is to satisfy my sexual curiosity."

And I just thought how fascinating it is that what the New Testament writers call "sexual immorality," in the late modern secular west we call "sexual curiosity." Because that's the world that we live in. The only virtue left is tolerance and the only sin left is intolerance. The problem is that tolerance isn't really a virtue, in my opinion. Feel free to disagree here, but love is a virtue. Tolerance is more like a philosophy for how to not kill each other when you think that you are more virtuous than somebody else. So, there's classic tolerance, which is, "Hey, we disagree on God, Bible, ethics, sexuality, marriage. Let's not kill each other. Let's just disagree and have a civil debate and go our separate ways."

Then there's modern tolerance this is essentially, "Who are you to tell me what's right or wrong? You have no business. Get your laws off my body."

So, two very different interpretations of the idea of tolerance. Now, all of this makes it very hard to come along as a follower of Jesus and say to somebody that you love and care about, "There is a God who created you and is, by default, the authority, not only over your life, but over the world. And He has a vision of the good life for you. We know about it through the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the Bible as passed down from generation to generation by the tradition of the Church."

Like, that's not a popular message right now at all. This is a huge challenge, not only with how we interact with those outside the Church on issues of, say, sexuality or marriage, but even inside of the Church. One of the reasons that we're doing The Year of Biblical Literacy and we're all reading through the Bible together and hopefully you're on track with us, we're in the Gospel of Mark right now, we start the Gospel of Luke in just a day or two. If you're new to our community, just jump in. Go to our website. All the info is there and we're reading through the Bible together. One of the reasons that we're doing that, we're teaching through the Old Testament, is because across our nation, at least at a millennial level, we are living in a crisis of Biblical authority right now.

All the conversations about the redefinition of sex, marriage, justice, money, all of that is a secondary conversation. The primary conversation right now is, "Is the New Testament authoritative and, if so, in what way?" In so many areas right now, we are more influenced than we are influencer. This anti-authoritarianism that is so prevalent in our culture, man, it's not only out there, it's in here as well.

Then third, moving on, is this idea of rampant hedonism. In the 1970s, one of the reasons Portland is such a great city is because we were way ahead of the game, as most of you know, on urban planning. So, there was a plan that was put together in the 1970s for the future of Portland that we're living in right now with the street car and all of that. At the top of that plan was a one-word summary – this is from city hall - and it was this: "Portland's not a geographic location; it's a way of life."

Like, you know you're headed for glory when city hall, the government, is writing that way. And I like to think about Portland as, essentially, a temple to the god of hedonism; a temple to the god of pleasure. Our city's way of life is so *laissez-faire*. Our mantra is if it feels good, do it. "Don't crucify your desires," in the language of Jesus or as the Church has said for millennia. "No, if you do that, it's repressive or if somebody else does that to you it's oppressive. No. If it feels good, it must be good. If it feels bad, it must be bad."

Does any of that sound familiar? Part of this is because we live in this odd moment where, even though science and technology is at an all time high – so, like, the new iPhone doesn't even have a headphone jack. Oh my gosh. We've changed the world. Still, and this is fascinating to me, our generation, in particular if you're young, but not really across the board, is marked by what social critics are calling "intellectual lethargy" or laziness. So, illiteracy rates in the U.S. are rising, not dropping. Most Americans read at a fifth grade level. There's a reason that Hunger Games is so popular. One is because it's awesome. Two, because most of us read at that level. We're like, "Oh, great. A story for kids. I'm 39. This is just perfect for me."

80% of Americans don't read a book all the way through after their last year of education. For whatever reason, I've been reading a lot of early American literature lately. A biography and a few other things. And it's fascinating to me how intelligent it is. So, I read the Declaration of Independence a few weeks ago, the whole thing, not just the line, for a teaching I did. And, dude, I'm no savant by any stretch of the imagination, but I'm not dumb or anything. I was lost. Seriously. I got the life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness line. After that, it was way over my head. It was more – and it wasn't just archaic language – intelligent than what I'm... it was over my head.

T.V. and the internet and social media have just done a number on our culture. So, recently, I got around to reading "Amusing Ourselves to Death" by Neil Postman. Have any of you read this? Oh my gosh. Yes. Yes. You've read it and you're clapping. It's so dang good. It's so depressing. Oh my gosh. It's basically just about how T.V. destroyed America. But, honestly, it's well written and it's well worth your time. Thirty years old and it's more prophetic than ever. Who knows what he would say about Wi-Fi and social media. But, he has this chapter called "Now This" where he writes about the news and how America basically changed with the invention of electricity and the telegraph and when news became a commodity and now T.V. news. And he writes about that line, "Now this," how the average news segment is 30 seconds long. And, of course, Twitter is even worse at 140 characters.

So, we live in this endless stream of factoid followed by pithy saying followed by Scripture followed by headline followed by joke followed by picture of Taylor Swift kissing Loki. It's so overwhelming that at some point we just shut off and we let other people do our thinking for us. And the two greatest areas, he would argue, that you see this right now is in religion and in politics, where it's become less and less intellectual and more people are doing our thinking for us. And there's a huge danger in that. With all this information overload, with the world at our fingertips – I love Greg McKeown's line in his book, Essentialism, about the iPhone. He writes:

"For some of us, the world in our pocket is just a little bit much."

I love that idea. With all this information overload, we turn to escapism. We just disappear into our phone or our video game or our Netflix queue or the local tavern or a good glass of wine with a friend or whatever. Not bad stuff necessarily, but rather than doing the hard work of wrestling out a vision of the good life. So, Postman opens and closes his book – and this was just... you have to be extra nerdy to be into this. I thought it was brilliant – by comparing and contrasting two of the most famous literary sci-fi novels of the 20th century. So, the first was 1984 by George Orwell. Most of you know that. That's where the "big brother" idea comes from. The commercial that made Apple famous back in the day was based on it. Then the other is "Brave New World" by Huxley, which I just went out and read this week. Oh my gosh. So, Orwell's vision of the future is basically of North Korea. So, he's writing in the 1930s. The rise of Nazism, communism, imperial Japan. And he looks forward 50 years and he sees this big brother and totalitarian state and he sees that as the future. Huxley, on the other hand, oh my gosh. You need to go read this. I was going to read it. I don't have time. I'm running out of time. I was going to read an excerpt for you.

But, his vision of the future is totalitarian, but in a totally other way. It's a few hundred years in the future, technology has replaced God. So, time is measured from the invention of the automobile. Ford, as in Henry Ford, has replaced God. Sex has replaced the family. So, morality has been inverted. Motherhood, fatherhood and family are immoral. Children are grown chemically in a factory and then raised to do basically nothing but have sex and go shopping. Then justice is replaced by consumerism and classism. So, there's give classes. The story's written from the top class that's 8% of the society. Everybody else is just working to make their life absolutely beautiful. So, it's a world that is just drowning in technology, sex and consumerism.

Does any of that sound familiar? So, this is almost 100 years old and Postman basically

opens his book by saying, "Orwell's the famous one and he was wrong. Unless you live in North Korea, he was wrong. Huxley was right."

We live in a world that is just obsessed with technology, sex and consumerism, and we are literally, in his language, amusing ourselves to death. Now, rant over. I just had to talk about sci-fi. I just had to. But, it wasn't Star Wars. That was growth; maturity. Right? That's right.

This is a huge challenge for the Church. It's a huge challenge. How do we not get sucked in? You know, case in point, one of the issues – we've talked about this openly with you over the last few months – that we're having right now, and this is so weird to say, but is church attendance. So, I'm old enough now that, when I was a kid, if you were part of the core of your church, you were at church literally every single week unless if you had the flu. Even when you were on vacation. Remember back in the day – for some of you this is going to sound so weird – if you grew up in the church you had visitors and a welcome info packet and you'd sometimes pray over people that were visiting? Because people would go on vacation and they'd actually go to church, not out to brunch for a mimosa. Mind blowing idea. It was back in the 80s. Alright?

Then I remember there was a shift, I don't know, in the early 90s when it was like most people it was more like three out of four weekends. So, it was like you got one weekend to just go to the beach or have your mimosa. One. That's all. Now we're at the spot where, in an urban context in a city like Portland, honestly, for most people, turning up to church once or twice a month is becoming a new normal. How in the world do A, we lead a community forward and B, how do you flourish and thrive as a follower of Jesus when one of the most central spiritual disciplines or practices of Jesus, who was at the synagogue every single Sabbath morning, how do we move forward?

This is not to slam you. I feel this myself. I feel this draw. I don't go to church on vacation. Are you kidding? I work for one. I sleep in. I feel this draw and this pull in my own heart and my mind. You know, one of the main issues that I'm dealing with right now in my discipleship to Jesus at this stage of life is just the fight against apathy. Or, in the language of the New Testament, lukewarmness. That's language we don't really talk about anymore, but it's more relevant than ever before.

I was thinking this morning as I was thinking about tonight about that line in Paul's letter to the romans: "Never be lacking in spiritual fervor." Or it can be translated, "Spiritual zeal."

And I thought, "Man, I'm lacking in that a lot and I work for the church."

But, it's so easy just to put it into maintenance mode, do my thing, show up at church when it works and then kind of go about my life. I've got Netflix, I've got Wi-Fi, I've got Apple Music. Life is good. I'm fine. There's not the ache, there's not the thirst. We're just amusing ourselves to death.

So, I think this is a huge challenge. How do we live in a hedonistic city? And I'm not all against that. Like, I love the food, the drink, the wine, the culture, the beauty. I love our city. But, how do we live here and keep our spiritual fervor alive and stay healthy and thriving in the world? Now, as a result of all of this, the church in the West is, sad but true, kind of disappearing.

Mark Sayers, our friend from Australia, opens his book, *Disappearing Church*, with four disappearances that we're living in right now. The disappearance, first, of the Judeo-Christian worldview from Western culture. We see that all over the place. The disappearance of a large segment of believers across the West who are walking away from the Church and from Jesus altogether. Third, the disappearance of a number of churches closing their doors for good. We see that on a regular basis. Becoming a McMenamins or whatever. Then fourth, he writes about – and I just wanted to quote this – "The disappearance of a mode of church engagement characterized by commitment, resilience and sacrifice among many Western believers. In its place, a new mode of disengaged Christian faith and church interaction is emerging. This new mode is characterized by sporadic engagement, passivity, commitment phobia and a consumerist framework."

I just want to read that last line one more time: "This new mode is characterized by sporadic engagement, passivity, commitment phobia and a consumerist framework."

And, by the way, I'm just so grateful – and I know I speak on behalf of our staff and

leadership – for so many of you that are just living against this flow of culture that are coming on Sunday and you're in community and you're serving and you're giving and you're practicing the way of Jesus all week long. I look out and I see – they tell you that a church of millennials can't make it in an urban context and I'm like, "We can. Barely, but we can."

I'm just so – and I know you're not all millennials. If you're not, by the way, we just thank God for you. We just say, if you're over 36, we just love you. But, I'm so proud and so grateful to God for the way that some – not all of you, a lot of you, this is you to a T. Like, that last line is your relationship to Bridgetown or whatever your church of choice is. But, so many of you are living against this. I'm so grateful for you.

Now, as we wrap up, I'm not saying that this is the end of the world. I was in conversation with a friend recently, kind of a family friend who's a number of decades older than I am, who's not a part of our community and doesn't live here, lives in a country context in a far more conservative environment. We had a great chat and he was listening to our podcast online. And he said, "Ah, man. I loved that creative minority stuff." And then he had this fascinating line. He said, "But, it was so depressing."

He's like, "Oh my gosh. That's where our culture is going? It was so depressing."

And it kind of is, in particular if you're old enough to remember America before the shift to a post-Christian culture. But, it's not all doom and gloom at all. My agenda tonight is not at all to slam our culture or rail you or bum you out. So, please don't misunderstand me. If I sound that way, it's probably just the Nyquil. Or Dayquil. Hopefully it wasn't Nyquil. Wow. That would explain a lot.

I actually think that exile can be a beautiful moment for the Church. If we live under Daniel's mentorship, a life of no compromise, calling, non-participation, resistance, witness, kingdom over empire, and hope. I think what will emerge from exile is a Church marked by three things, as we wrap up.

Instead of hyper-individualism, community. We will not make it alone. Exile is way too hard. The pressure, even in a city like ours, is way too intense. It is time to come together to make Church not an airplane, but a family. More than an event you do on a Sunday, but a community of people that you live with. This is where Daniel is a great example to the modern world of living in community with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Daniel was not alone. He was there, shoulder to shoulder, arm to arm, with the people of God.

Secondly, instead of anti-authoritarianism, purity. The consumer, the lazy, those on the fringe will not survive exile. Sadly, a lot of people will get sucked into orbit by the gravity of the city. But, a lot of other people, even in this room tonight, will go through a kind of purification. So, some of you a year or two from now, you won't be here. And by "here," I don't just mean at Bridgetown, I mean you won't even be in the Kingdom of God. That's a sad, but true truth. But, others of you will go through a purification as we live as a community under the authority of the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament, as we live into Jesus' vision of the good life, not our own, and, in doing so, as we rediscover what it means to be human, to be male, to be female, to be sexual, to be spiritual, a purity will come to the Church. And, once again, Daniel is a great example to the modern world of living under the authority of God as expressed through the Bible.

Third, instead of rampant hedonism is creativity. I love this line from the writer Michael Frost:

"The word of exile is to rediscover the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the early Church and to apply them to life on the soil of a post-Christian world."

But, this takes creativity, right, to innovate, to adapt, not to compromise, but to figure out how to be the people of God in this time and place. The vision series starts, I think, in two weeks. Man, we have a whole new vision to lay out and lead into over the coming months. We've been beta testing a whole bunch of new ideas kind of behind the scenes and all this stuff I'm just aching to tell you all about. And it's all come out of this culture moment. Asking the question week after week after week, "How do we be a healthy, thriving church even in the corrosive soil of a city like Portland?"

So, I have a lot of hope for the future. A lot. I really do. I think this is a great time to be a follower of Jesus in our city. Now, to end, we want to kind of mix things up tonight and we actually want to stand up in a second and pray together. Over and over in Daniel, if you've been reading through, you know that Daniel, over and over, turns to prayer. From the famous story of Daniel and the lions' den to this story right here in chapter 9. So, turn

to chapter 9 and we'll just kind of end by reading this. I know tonight was more lecture than teaching from the Bible, but we'll just end by reading this, essentially, prayer.

Daniel 9: "In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."

So, "I'm in exile."

Notice Daniel's response to exile:

"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition," – that's really asking God to move – "in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."

With fervor.

"I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:"

And then there's this is beautiful, poetic line of prayer. Go read on your own time. Skip down to Daniel 9:20.

"While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight..." – and then notice this line – "...about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and he said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out,'"

And the story goes on. The crazy thing about that line, "about the the time of the evening sacrifice," is there was no more evening sacrifice. If you know your Bible, the temple had been destroyed, all of Jerusalem had been destroyed. And where is Daniel? Is he in Jerusalem? No. He's in Babylon. The time of the evening sacrifice? There is no more time of the evening sacrifice. But remember: Daniel prayed morning, noon and what? Night. So, he built his practice of fixed-hour prayer around the rhythm of the temple. Sacrifice morning, noon and night. Meaning that even in the thick of Babylon, even after six decades in exile, Daniel was still rooted in hope for the Kingdom of God. That was the center of his life.

All that to say I really believe, work aside, culture stuff aside, witness, all of that aside, the single most important thing we can do in exile is pray. So, let's all stand together.