

Staying Power: “Thriving in Exile”

Daniel 1

Small Group Discussion

Intro question (give everyone a chance to answer)

- Have you ever known anyone who was like the “Energizer Bunny”—someone who just keeps going? What gives them their stamina?

Background: We’re beginning a series in the book of Daniel. The book begins at the beginning the Exile—when the Southern Kingdom of Israel spent approximately 70 years in Babylon. Daniel was among the first captives taken, in the first capture of Jerusalem. If you have the time, **read 2 Kings 24:10-25:12** for the background to this period.

Read Daniel 1:1-7, then discuss the following.

- What can you gather about Daniel from these verses?
- What was King Nebuchadnezzar attempting to do with these young, Jewish deportees?
- Why do you think that the King gave new names to the four men in v. 7?
- Why is it significant that “the Lord” is the subject of the verb in v. 2?
- Would you agree with this week’s sermon, that like Daniel, **we find ourselves in Exile**? Why or why not?
- Pastor Josh said, “it is God’s way, we see throughout history, to take his people into situations where they **lose the cultural power**, so that he can work in them and through them there.”
 - What other examples can you recall in Scripture, when God puts his people in this kind of “Exile” situation?
 - How might “Exile” be both good for God’s people, and good for their captors?
 - How might it be a good thing that Christians in America are losing cultural power, in a culture that is not so friendly to biblical values anymore?
- As we saw Sunday, there are two default ways that people might respond to being in “Exile.” The first is to separate/isolate, in a Christian enclave, protected from all “secular” influences, and the second is to assimilate, or simply adopt the values and practices of the surrounding culture.
 - What are the potential benefits of each approach?
 - What are the potential dangers of each approach?
 - Do you think that you tend to naturally gravitate toward one of these approaches?
- Daniel rose to the top level of influence in a totally secular culture—without falling into either of these extreme approaches—and yet never became tainted by it. How do you think he did this?

Read Daniel 1:8-16, then discuss the following.

- Why did Daniel ask to eat only vegetables?
- Is this passage prescribing a vegetarian diet for us? Why or why not?

- Daniel was trying to hold to the Jewish dietary laws, in an effort to cling to his core identity.
 - What in Daniel's circumstances required him to draw a line around his diet?
 - How were the food restrictions the one practice, in Exile, that could help Daniel remember his core identity?
- Read Mark 7:17-23. Why does Mark insist that Jesus' statement declared all foods clean?
- Pastor Josh said that if we want to thrive in Exile, we must **cling to our core, gospel identity**.
 - In what way does the gospel give us our core identity?
 - What does it mean to cling to this gospel identity?
 - How does this practice guard us against both extremes, separation and assimilation?
 - What practices in your life help you to cling to your gospel identity?

Read Daniel 1:17-21, and then discuss the following.

- How do you know that Daniel and his friends have mostly gone along with the Babylonian re-education program? How might this learning have conflicted with their Jewish upbringing?
- Why were Daniel and his friends justified in taking this approach?
- What are some practices and values of the culture around you that you can and should embrace, like Daniel did, and what are some where you feel a need to draw a line?
- Read Jeremiah 29:4-11. Daniel would have heard and known Jeremiah's letter. How did these words impact his approach to the Babylonian re-education program?
- Pastor Josh said that based on Jeremiah's words, and Daniel's example, you can thrive in Exile if you **invest yourself wholly in the good of the place you're planted**.
 - Writer John Goldingay says that this approach requires a "*discriminating openness*" to the learning and cultures of the place where God has placed you. What does this mean in our setting?
 - Tim Keller suggests that this approach means to "put your lives on the line to make this a great place to live—safe, and prosperous." What would this approach look like in your sphere?
 - Are there ways that you've felt drawn to invest in the community around you, where you just needed God's permission? If so, how does today's study free you or guide you?
 - How can this group, together, take this approach?
- In Nebuchadnezzar's response to the four young men, how do we see that Daniel's approach was effective for God's purposes?

PRAY

- Take some time to pray for the opportunities and struggles that you have already mentioned. Also share about any other pressing needs and pray for them.