

BIG IDEA: God is in control.

Daniel 1:2 - Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And **the Lord delivered** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

Even in chaos, confusion, and exile, Daniel understood that God was in control.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Jeremiah 29:11 - *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

How has this well-known verse offered you comfort?

How does knowing this verse was written to a people in exile give you additional hope?

What would it look like for you to thrive in your life today?

What parts of your life aren't thriving?

Daniel's ability to thrive- even exiled and isolated in Babylon- was rooted in the realization that God was in control, even when things seem out of control.

How can a strong, Daniel-like belief that God is in control help you through current circumstances where many things seem out of control?

What are three areas in your life where you currently could use a Daniel-like perspective:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ACTION STEPS:

Conversation: Discuss the three areas in your life you listed with somebody you love and trust. Have them share their three areas. Spend time praying directly and specifically for each other.

For Memorization and Meditation:

John 16:33 - *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

BIG IDEA: *Stir yourself up*

2 Timothy 1:6 (NKJV) - *Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you...*

Pastor Justin talked about "educational independence" and the value in being able to stir yourself up spiritually. It wasn't about a discontinuation of gathering, but a spiritual growth that isn't limited to times of gathering... solitary refinement.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

Last week's sermon talked about the time all missionaries were either imprisoned or deported from China for years due to persecution. The church didn't implode. It exploded in growth.

What did Pastor Justin attribute this growth to? Why do you think it happened?

We examined the 12 pathways last week in the book *Praxis: Prayer, Scripture, Worship, Fasting, Relationship, Accountability, Reaching, Gathering, Serving, Resting, Stewardship, and Giving*

All of these are needed to stir yourself and grow, what three do you feel you need to grow in most?

1.)

2.)

3.)

How can you grow in them even in this season of "social distancing?"

ACTION STEPS:

Conversation: Discuss the three areas in your life you listed with somebody you love and trust. Have them share their three areas. Spend time praying directly and specifically for each other.

Read:

Galatians 5:25-26 (MSG) - Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.

Put this on an index card or small piece of paper and keep it nearby this week.

BIG IDEA: Your habits fuel your hope

Daniel 6:10 - *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed... He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done.*

You habits are daily liturgies; traditional liturgies by definition are patterns and practices that shape your worship. So the question is do my practical habits line up with my theological beliefs? (for example: as we discussed on Monday, Daniel had a firm belief that God was in control. So practically we find him in prayer going to God again and again)

Questions to consider:

In light of Daniel's enemies making it illegal for him to pray to Yahweh, Pastor Justin asked: "If the enemy wanted to take your joy and stability... what would he take?"

How would you honestly answer this personally?

How has your daily media intake influenced your levels of joy or hope in the past weeks?

Do you spend more time looking at the headlines in the news or the highlights in your Bible?

"Garbage in, Garbage out" also known as GIGO, is an old computer term that speaks to the reality that you get out what you put in. Bad numbers will result in bad answers. In tough times when the world is in crisis, a hope problem is often a GIGO problem.

How can you adjust your daily liturgies, habits, and inputs to stir up more faith, hope and love?

What is the first thing you read or look at before you go to bed?

What is the first thing you read or look at before going to bed?

The Bible says Daniel went on praying "as he had always done."

What are some disciplines you would love other people say you do "as you've always done?"

Action Steps:

Personal Step: Find whatever social media or media platform is feeding you the most anxiety and worry, and fast from it for a time. Feed on God's Word (Psalm 27 & 91 are a good start)

Memorization: (Right after the verse about a peace beyond understanding that comes through prayer, we find another recipe for peace of mind in Philippians 4 that reflects the GIGO concept...) *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. – Philippians 4:8*

Read: Consider reading "The Common Rule" by Justin Earley about the power of habits and little liturgies.

BIG IDEA: Seasons of suffering

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego often get held up as examples for us. But in reality, they were exceptions. Nearly all of their countrymen and their own families continued to live in impoverished exile. And even for their promotion to the Babylonian program, Daniel and his friends weren't without suffering.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Why do you think trials are normative for the life, but especially the Christian life?

One of the craziest statistics you will ever hear is that roughly 60 percent of Londoners who lived through the Blitz remember it - a period in 1940 when Germany bombed London for 57 consecutive nights. - as the happiest period of their lives. Their explanation? They learned things like courage, sharing, and hope. Would they have asked for that suffering? Not in a million years. Yet it was the season in their life that they pointed to as the *HAPPIEST*.

In what seasons of your life have you had the most significant spiritual growth?

What have you learned recently in the midst of a difficult situation?

Recount a trial that felt far too big for you to bear. What enabled you to endure it?

Have there been any "Blitzes" in your life that you would have never asked for, yet you are thankful for?

ACTION STEPS:**For Memorization and Meditation:**

James 1:2-4 - *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Pray: Our prayer in hard seasons is often "LORD, get me out of this!" Dare to ask God, "LORD, what do you want me to get out of this?"

BIG IDEA: A faith that is solely inward focused is out of focus

Daniel 6:10 - *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem.*

A faith that is solely inward focused is out of focus. In seasons of hardship and social distancing it is easy to be concerned with "me and mine." Yet God always calls us to love of neighbor.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

How do you think David's habit of praying at a window that looked out upon a pagan culture that desperately needed God effected the prayers he prayed?

What are some outward-focused prayers of faith that you can pray in this season?

What are three practical ways that you can love your neighbor, even in a season of social distancing?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ACTION STEPS:

Write a handwritten note of encouragement or thanks for someone, in or out of the church, and mail it to them.

Take one of those practical ways to serve your neighbor and walk it out.

While you're at it invite them to view this weekend's steam at citylifeva.com/livestream!