

## **SOLITARY REFINEMENT - Daniel 1:1-2**

In this season **we may feel exiled**. Sent home from work. Told not to not gather as a congregation. Kept out of sitting down in our favorite restaurant.

But in the book of Daniel **the Israelites were exiled**. Uprooted from home and taken captive to Babylon. They were exiled physically and isolated spiritually.

Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – they were pulled from the group of exiles into a Babylonian program packed with not just a new culture, but pagan practices, and *increased* isolation.

And yet this is where they didn't just **survive**, but they **thrived** and saw God move in ways that are legendary thousands of years later.

**HOW?** *How do you not just survive but thrive seasons that feel like exile?  
How do I experience solitary refinement when life feel like confinement?*

***A faith that God is in control.  
A focus on what I can control.***

The first way we thrive in seasons on confinement and exile is found in the context that Daniel gives us from the outset:

*“And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand”*

The greater implication – this means God delivered the Israelites into their hands.

Daniel knew God was in control of who was in control.

He knew this: ***Circumstances may seemingly get out of control. But God is always in control.***

*And if God is in power, we don't panic.*

*If God is in control, we don't catastrophize.*

*If God is at home on the throne, then hope can fill our homes.*

Those are perspectives rooted in the promises of scripture.

The question becomes – are you rooted in scripture?

What voices will be preaching to your head and your heart tomorrow? Monday? Tuesday?

Because the voices you choose will determine your perspective.

The voices you choose will determine your level of hope.

***What is the louder voice speaking into your life right now?  
The Headlines in the News, or the Highlights in your Bible?***

Struggling with worry and anxiety in this season? Need more hope and faith? Romans says faith comes by hearing the Word of God. You don't need to be ordained to preach to yourself, to speak the word of God over yourself, or to prophecy His promises over your home.

This is no doubt some of what the apostle Paul was speaking to when he tells his son in the faith Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:6 (NKJV) - I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you**

Paul was in prison in Rome. In confinement.  
And he was imploring Timothy to learn solitary refinement.

There were **two kinds of teachers** when it came time for a quiz or test. There was the kind that would welcome your questions and help walk you down the path toward an answer. Then there's the teacher that would give you a shrug or look that told you you're on your own. Students like the first teacher. But the second teacher was freeing us from being educationally dependent, by teaching us to take our head knowledge and apply it ourselves.

I believe this is significant for us, the church in this season...  
And as we've been in this season of social distancing and not able to gather with our congregation, preachers, and teachers, I keep thinking back to a specific piece of church history:

When Communists rose to power in China, all of some 6000 missionaries and trained pastors were either imprisoned or expelled. Communists aggressively sought to uproot and eliminate the church, so the church in China for all intents and purposes went off the grid.

The global church was left wringing their hands worrying about what would happen to the church in China, stripped of its teachers and pastors like that... and what happened?

It has been estimated by historians that the revival in China during this time was the greatest numerical revival in history. Conservative estimates say there were 750,000 Christians in China when pastors and missionaries were expelled. In 1980 when the country opened its doors again- there were an estimated 35 million believers.

In their homes together, even without formal pastors or missionaries, they took control of their own development, and stirred themselves up and fanned their flame into the flames of revival.

I believe we can see the same in this season. God is always setting the stage for his glory.

We need the faith that knows God is in control.  
But we also need the focus on what we can control.

It becomes easy in wild seasons like this to throw your hands up, lose focus, and drift...  
...even compromise. But Daniel knew that in spite of things spiraling out of control, he could focus on what he could control. We can too. Our decisions. Our discipline. Our habits.

**We read about the 12 pathways as we read through in the Praxis book last week...**

*Examples in Daniel's life.*

Daniel controlled what he could control.  
He couldn't gather in worship and celebrate all the feast days and alike when he was in exile.  
But there were disciplines he could still walk in. And he walked in them.

*"When I walk in these 12 spiritual disciplines, the 12 pathways, I become a person of virtue."*

And he became a person of such virtue that in Daniel when his opponents in the Babylonian government tried to find a weakness or flaw they could cripple him with, they couldn't. It says in Daniel 6:4 – ***they could find no corruption in him.***

So instead they tried to cripple him by taking away what was most important to him.

***If somebody carefully studied your life and tried to steal your joy or source of strength what would it be?***

Your cell phone? Your Netflix account? Your car keys?  
Your Bible? Your ability to pray?

They try to cripple Daniel by stripping him of his prayer life.  
They made an edict saying you could only pray to the King, or risk execution.  
What does Daniel do?  
It says he goes to pray at his window.... ***“just as he'd always done.”***

The difference between merely surviving and thriving is how you fill in that blank.  
What are your habits? What would your biographer call *“what you've always done?”*

There's so much you can't control. But that you can control your habits.  
And you can control your response.

A pandemic has our world gripped with fear? *Pray as you've always done.*  
Another election is set to sow division into our nation? *Pursue relationship as you've always done.*  
The headlines look hopeless? *Meditate on God's Word as you've always done.*

How do we experience solitary refinement amidst our confinement?  
How do we grow even when we can't gather? How do we thrive and not just survive?

***We have faith that God is in control. And we focus on what we can control.***

*I can't control the fact we can't gather on Saturdays.  
But I can control my personal walk and spiritual discipline.  
I can't control things shutting down left and right.  
But I can control how I love my wife.  
I can't control the schools closing for the year.  
But I can control the atmosphere of my home as I actively love my kids.*

We want to help you in setting that atmosphere.  
The same way we offered the Praxis book last week for free, I've put together five days of devotionals on this subject to go through personally or as a family. You'll find that download made readily available at [citylifeva.com](http://citylifeva.com) alongside this sermon.

But before we close... the key to thriving isn't self help. It's Jesus. Focus on what you can control, yes. But above all else, fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.