

Hillside Fellowship Church  
Pastor Dave Tooker  
April 11, 2021

Waking up in Oz  
Daniel 1:1-21

[Worship]

Well, good morning, Hillside. We ask you to join the celebration as we baptize two young followers and disciples of the next step in following Jesus as a disciple. Charlie, why don't you come on up?

[applause]

Now, Charlie, your grandpa's going to ask you a few questions, okay?

Grandpa: Good morning. Thank you for enjoying this moment with us today. Charlie, why are you desiring to be baptized today?

Charlie: To show the public that I love God.

Grandpa: And the Bible tells us that we are all born into this world with a sin nature. Do you know that you have sinned?

Charlie: Yes.

Grandpa: [Audio cut] . . . Son of God. That he came to this earth and lived a perfect life with no sin and that he died on a cross for your sins and mine and that he rose from the dead, conquering sin and death? Do you believe that?

Charlie: Yes.

Grandpa: And is it your heart's desire to live a life pleasing to Jesus, that all the days of your life you would walk in his ways, honoring the truth of his word through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit?

Charlie: Yes.

Grandpa: It is my absolute, indescribable honor to baptize you this morning, Charlie Joy Shin, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[applause]

Church, would you stand with me please? Let's pray for Charlie and for the Shin family, this morning. Heavenly Father, thank you for just the privilege it is to bear witness to the work that you are doing in Charlie's life through the Shin family. That you're changing lives. Father, we don't just have the slogan that Jesus changes everything. We get the privilege and the pleasure of witnessing it. And thank you for beginning that work in Charlie's life and thankful that you will see it through to fruition.

Now, Father, as we turn our hearts back through song and worship to you, Lord Jesus, thank you for what a privilege it is to meet with your people in this place for your fame and your glory. In Christ's name. Amen.

[Worship]

Pastor Dave: Father, thank you for incredible, amazing faithfulness that met my unfaithfulness and failure with the fantastic truth of the gospel. And so we come and we simply humble ourselves saying, thank you. We don't deserve any of your goodness and yet, you've given it all to us in your Son, Jesus Christ. So thank you that in a world of darkness and brokenness, you've given us reason to celebrate. You've given us a great deal of hope through your Son, Jesus Christ.

So I pray today, that as we open up your word, that your Spirit would guide us into all truth that you would strengthen, that you would truly heal broken hearts this morning. I pray for those who are hear who don't know you, who don't have hope through your Son, Jesus Christ. They don't know the forgiveness that is offered in him. I pray today that you'd open up their eyes, soften their hearts that they might be able to hear what an incredible God you are and how good you've

been to us. And so would you give me strength as I open myself to serve and support your body through the power of your Spirit, for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Welcome. As you're being seated, I'm so glad you're here. I've met a bunch of people, it's your first time. So I just want to say, welcome to Hillside Fellowship. We believe Jesus changes everything. He starts by changing us. We typically want him to start by changing people out there. Don't we? It's like, man, if he would just change everybody out there, everything would be awesome.

But he starts by changing us and he changes us from the inside out. He grows us and matures us and then he teaches us how to love each other so that we become this picture of what a community that's formed around Christ looks like. So if you're here, it's your first time, so glad you're here. Nothing special about me. My name's Dave. I'm a new creature in Christ, new creation in Christ and recovering addict and alcoholic. I'm the most surprised one here that I'm a pastor.

[Chuckling.]

So if you're here, man, Jesus saved me. If there's hope for me, there's hope for everybody. And love that. Special time this morning celebrating the baptism with Ralph. Thanks for that, Ralph. Well done.

If you're looking to take the next step, there's a newcomer's class next week. I think it's at 10:30. Is that true, Ralph? Next week, 10:30? I get a thumbs up. So take that next step. Come meet some of the elders and man, see if Jesus wouldn't have you join us here in this mission of watching Jesus change everything.

We're starting out a new series today. So if you'll open up your Bibles to Daniel, I'm going to read the first two verses of the first chapter of Daniel and we're going to enjoy it together. And I'm going to explain to you why we're walking through Daniel and hopefully it will become very, very clear.

So in Daniel chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, and I'll probably read this every week that we go through Daniel just so we can stay together on this. If you don't get verses 1 and 2, you're not going to get anything else. In chapter 1, verse 1, God says, Daniel writes, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into Nebuchadnezzar's hand along with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he (Nebuchadnezzar) brought them to the land of Shinar to the house of his god and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god."

Now the question has to be answered; why would we jump into Daniel? So let me give you the big theological picture. I'll give you the small theological picture through the whole Bible and hopefully I'll give you a picture of why we're walking through this this morning so we can all be on the same page.

If you read straight through the Bible, Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, one of the big ideas that you would walk away with, that would give you a lot of comfort, confidence and courage is this. God has a plan. That doesn't seem like a big idea, but it really is. God has a plan. In fact, if you read through Jeremiah -- well, let me ask you this. How many of you have Jeremiah 29:11 on a placard in your home? Do you really, Marilyn? Love it. No shame in this. I'm genuinely curious. Or you've got it on a coffee mug? Or on a magnet on your refrigerator?

See, what Jeremiah 29:11 says, God has a plan. "I know the plans that I have for you. Plans to prosper you, not to harm you. A plan to give you a hope and a future." Do you know who Jeremiah was writing to when he wrote chapter 29? Here's your homework. Read through Jeremiah chapter 29. He's writing to Daniel in exile, who'd had his whole family killed. He was captured. He and a bunch of his buddies were carried off. They were made into eunuchs. Their names were changed. They were made to study demonology and other astrology and terrible things.

And in the middle of that, God says, hey, I need you to know. It's really dark out there, but I've got a plan and it's a really good plan.

So there's the big idea. God has a plan. Here's the small theological picture. The enemy has a plan, but it's not for your delight. It's to devour and destroy you. And he's got a long-term plan and he'll play that out. If he can do that through anxiety, panic, fear, stress, worry, agitation, irritation, frustration, other things, he'll use them just to get you off God's plan onto your own plan.

Now, a lot of you have your own plan today. Right? And I hope it works out for you, but it won't. You can't even keep track of your keys, bro.

[Chuckling.]

And you're going to try and come up with a plan for your life. I want you to think about that every time you lose your keys. It's like, wait a minute. I probably shouldn't trust my own plan. I should trust God's plan. Now, in God's plan, he sends an amazing rescuer. We call it the Gospel, the Good News. God humbled himself, emptied himself, and in the person of Jesus Christ, he came and joined us. Jesus, the Son of God, lived a life without sin so he could die in our place for our sins so he could be buried, conquer the enemy we couldn't conquer. It's called death. He rose again and now he offers salvation. That is eternal life to anyone who would come to him. And he offers it freely, by grace, through faith. You can't earn it. I'll never deserve it. But he gives it because that's how good God is.

Now, with that big picture, let me tell you why we're going to walk through Daniel. We just spent two months walking through Proverbs, which is all about wisdom, how to align your life with reality as reality really is. And we saw, in Proverbs, there is a pattern in this world. There is a blueprint that if you follow that pattern, generally speaking, life would be better than if you didn't follow that pattern. That's called wisdom.

Proverbs gives us a pattern. Daniel gives us a picture that we can practice. If I take all of the prophets, Isaiah clear through Malachi, there's one prophet, Daniel, who uses the word wisdom more than any other place in the Old Testament. Daniel is a book, not just about, hey, I know the right things to do to follow the pattern. Daniel

steps into a day and age much worse than ours, y'all. How many think that things are off track in America and it's just gotten a little bit crazy? Okay. Look around. Like, we're freaking out a bit. Wait a minute. This is weird and everybody else acts like it's normal. Like, I wake up and it's like, listen, you need to know there's 64 genders and you need to learn all the acronyms to all the different genders.

And I'm like, excuse me? What?

[Chuckling.]

Yeah, there's 64. And if you get them wrong, you're going to offend somebody and they'll cancel you. I'm like, excuse me?

[Chuckling]

Again, my kids, they're here. I couldn't find my keys this morning and you want me to memorize 64 gender acronyms? Whatever happened to science? Male, female? I'm calling the sermons series, Waking up in Oz.

[Chuckling]

L Frank Baum? 1900? Wizard of Oz? Anybody? It was required reading for me. I didn't read it. I got the cliff notes.

[Laughter]

But I got the gist of it. What happens is, this young gal named Dorothy, she's in Kansas, just hanging out. Planting stuff, doing farm stuff. Tornado comes through. Dorothy gets sucked up and Toto. Toto's running through the air. I watched the movie.

[Laughter]

Because that only took like an hour and 32 minutes. Reading the book was like 10 hours. Seriously?

[Chuckling]

Anyway, the movie was great. They land in this place called Oz and when she comes to, everything is different. She's got munchkins running around her. I think that's the name, right? The munchkins? Singing? Or was that Oompah Loompas?

[Laughter]

Sorry. That's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Thank you.

[Laughter.]

Same gist. All of a sudden, I've got orange munchkins or Oompah Loompas. I got flying monkeys. I'm like, what? I went to sleep just a few days ago. I wake up and all the rules have changed. What do you do when all the rules have changed? There doesn't seem to be a manual because the rules are changing constantly, every day. Post-modernism, secular humanism gets to change the rules whenever they want and if you miss the rule change, you're canceled, kid. Ya basic and ya canceled. And we're supposed to keep up. It's crazy.

If only there were a book of the Bible that one day a young dude wakes up and everything is different that could show us how to navigate through this bizzare world that we're living in, and not just to navigate it, but to totally crush it and impact three kings and three kingdoms through some very simple truths that he lives out in his life. If only there were a book of the Bible where somebody had been in a dark world at a dark time and showed us simple truth about how to absolutely crush it over center field.

Ends up there is. It's the book of Daniel and each week I'm going to give you just a handful of tools where you can look at them and say, I now see how using these simple tools will allow Jesus Christ to utterly crush it through me. Watch this. We're going to start out. Today, I'm just going to give you three tools. I could give you like 20. I had to cut this back from 17 to 14. 14 back to 12. 12 down to 8. 8 down to 3. Just 3.

Number 1, your perspective is going to determine the path you take. How you perceive, your perspective of the events around you, elections, all that's going on around, your perspective is going to determine the path you take. What you focus on will form you. If you're focusing on negativity, garbage in, garbage out, bro. So your perspective. And I'll show you in verses 1 and 2, Daniel's perspective that allowed him to crush it. I mean crush . . . it.

Number 2, I'm going to tell you people matter. One of the greatest investments you'll ever make, ever make, is right around you. People matter. We're living in a day where people don't matter. People are to be used. They're a means to an end. And I'm going to tell you the greatest gift that I've ever had are the people here, my wife, my kids, and the community.

Number 3, I'm going to walk you through perseverance; why perseverance matters. Because it gives potential and possibility for God to show up and do something special. Perspective, people, personality. 17 minutes 54 seconds. Let's rock and roll. You guys ready?

[Chuckling.]

Pull up verses 1 and 2. Your perspective is largely going to determine the path you take. I'm going to say it again. Your perspective and how you perceive and interpret the events around you is largely going to determine the path you take. If you think that evil is winning, that darkness is dominant, that good never prevails, if you think that our government is utterly in control, you're going to end up fighting. You're going to be angry, bitter, resentful. Your cup is going to be filled up with bitterness and that's what you're going to give to one another.

I want to show you Daniel's perspective. This isn't my opinion. Watch Daniel's perspective. Ready? I'll read it to you. 1 "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakhin, king of Judah, . . . "

Now put a side note on that before I get to the really umph point. Go home and read 2 Kings 21 to 25, 2 Chronicles chapter 36. Things

are not good in the land of Judah. The nation has already split, like our Civil War. North, south. Not a lot of good stuff going on. In chapter 21 of 2 Kings, there's this young dude named Manassah. Bad king. Really bad. Super duper bad. He was like, what can I do to anger God? I'm going to do that. And then I'm going to double down on it and triple down on it. Manassah had a son named Ammon.

Ammon was like, I like what my daddy did. I'm going to do more of it. Horrible. God was like, I'm going to send you Jeremiah. I'm going to send you prophet after prophet to say, please repent. Stop it. Stop. They killed the prophets, they tortured the prophets, they wouldn't listen. After that, man, there's this child that became king. His name was Josiah. You gotta read about Josiah. It was a dark time. Some people found a copy of the Old Testament, the law. They brought it to Josiah and they're like, hey, man, we just found this in the treasury. Here's what God says. And this 12-year-old boy, when he heard what God had said, he just tears his clothes and he starts weeping.

He's like, we have sinned. We've gotta turn back to God. So God gave grace to the nation. But after him, there was Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. Two bad dudes. God finally said, no more. So God allowed the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar, to come down and capture his own people. So this was in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. Bad king.

"Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and he besieged it." Watch verse 2. Who is doing the verb here? Who's verbing it? Who's doing the action word? The . . . ? Now watch what the Lord did. Good. English teachers here, Chris, super duper proud of ya'll. The English teacher is super proud. "The Lord gave Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into Nebuchadnezzar's hands along with some of the vessels have the house of God."

So he allowed his people to be carried off, the king to be carried off and the special stuff from his temple to be carried off. "And he brought them (Nebuchadnezzar) to the land of Shinar and into the house of his gods and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his God."

So we just got told. This is perspective. Daniel is writing after all of his life. He looks back at what is possibly the worst event in his life. He gets captured. What we're going to see in verses 3, 4, and 5, he gets eunuchized, he loses some stuff in this process. Anyway, you'll get it when you get home. You'll be like, oh, my goodness. That's a bad day.

[Laughter]

Yeah. They change his name. It's horrible. I want you to see who is doing it, who did it from Daniel's perspective. The Lord. Are you guys all okay with that? I just dropped it on you. Here's the sovereignty of God. He reigns even over evil. He, in fact, directed Babylon to come down. Who's in charge of what's going on here? God is. And this is the point. Your perspective is largely going to determine your path. Daniel knew a secret that most of us don't know. Daniel understood a profound secret as he wrote. And his perspective was this; God's at work, even when I don't understand it. God's doing something profound, especially when I don't get it.

Daniel understood, God has a really bad habit. Now, if you're upset by what I just said, give me a little bit of grace. Chill out. Let me talk to the people who don't know Jesus. I know God doesn't have any bad habits. Let me talk to the people who aren't so religious. God has this bad habit. He oftentimes let the bad guys win. Do you know that? If you don't, then you've never read the Bible. I open it up. By the time I get to page 4, Cain kills Able. Cain wins. Cain's the bad guy. I go on. I keep following it. The religious people killed Jesus. The bad guys constantly win and Daniel knew a secret that most of us don't know.

God's got this habit of using the bad guys to discipline his own children. Now you may look at what's going on in America and say, God couldn't possibly allow this. There's no way God would let these laws get passed and this crazy go on. Yes, he could and he often does to deal with his church. Because for decades, we withdrew from the world. For more than decades, we put our hope in a governmental system to be our savior. God would never allow this.

Yes, he would. I read the book. He totally would and he often does over and over and over. And we don't get it.

You see? Daniel knew something that we often don't know and it shaped his perspective on all that was going on around him. Daniel knew that God is in control of who is in control. And I want you to write it down, because in about 3 1/4 years, we're going to have another election. And I want you to write this down somewhere where you can look at it every day. God is in control of who is in control. So when elections don't go your way, you don't have to freak out. It means God is doing something that you don't understand. And that's okay. It's okay. We may not like it. We might buy extra guns because we're afraid we're going to lose our 2nd amendment, right?

I know my crowd.

[Laughter]

Last time I said it, a dude lifted up his shirt and showed me his piece.

[Laughter]

Grandma's sitting in back like, [demonstrating] and she wasn't a Red Raider.

[Laughter]

I understand my audience and I get it. We live in South Texas. Everybody has guns. I'd be lying if I said, I never packed heat in the pulpit before. It was a death threat. I needed to pack heat but it kept pulling my pants down.

[Laughter]

It just got awkward. So I quit. I don't do it anymore. I know that's offensive, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders. Anyway. It's just the context of the culture. When we don't understand what's going on around us, it just means that God is in control of who is in control. My

parents used to take us on a road trip every year. They'd say, jump in the car. We're going. As a kid growing up, 4, 5 years old, do you know what? I never knew where dad was going. He would hand me the map. He wanted me to learn how to read a map.

I would look at it upside down. I didn't know. I just trusted dad. Dad knew how to get me there. Dad knew how to get me to Disneyland. I didn't. I didn't know north, south, east or west. But I trusted my dad's heart that it was good for me, even when I didn't understand his hand. You see, God is in control of who is in control. Dave, but how does the coronavirus and the election play into the end times? I don't know. Every day plays into the end times! Jesus is coming back! But he hasn't put me on the planning committee.

[Laughter.]

He hasn't put you on it either. I don't care how awesome your chart is. All the dashed lines, you go beautiful mind, you got red yarn going everywhere and you've figured out the date. Nobody's nailed it. You don't have it. But I know Jesus is coming back. Does today play into that? Absolutely! Does the coronavirus? Absolutely! Everything that happens every day is setting the stage for Jesus to come back. He's the hero. But if you don't understand that God is in control of who's in control, you're going to freak out. And guess what you're going to give to the people around you? Anger, anxiety, panic, fear, stress, worry.

Let me tell you. There's already enough of that going around. There's enough of it. We don't need anymore. What the world needs to see is a people of peace that understand God's in control of who's in control. Now, with the next 8 minutes, watch. I'm going to jump forward. I think it's verse 6 and 7. God has given us some very, very, very good gifts for this trip that we're on. Watch this. God didn't leave Daniel alone. Watch verse 6.

So Daniel gets carried off. He gets truly kidnapped. Him and his buddies. His family gets put to death. Daniel's carried off. Watch this. Verse 6. "Now among those that were carried off into captivity, from the sons of Judah, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them. And to Daniel, he assigned the name Belshazzar. To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael, Meshach and to Azariah, Abednego."

Let me explain what just happened. Kidnapped, taken to a different country, castrated, forced to study demonology, astrology, all the Chaldean literature. They don't have their family, their homes to sleep in. They changed Daniel's name from Daniel to Belshazzar. You know what Belshazzar means? Bel was the demon god of the Babylonians. Shazzar means prince. So basically they said, your name's Daniel. That means God is my judge. We don't like that. We're going to call you Satan's Prince from now on. So they've totally destroyed Daniel's life.

Do you see the beautiful gift that God has given Daniel in this passage though? You don't see it, huh? It kind of sneaks its way in. You see, life is difficult, but it's impossible to alone. Suffering is difficult. I don't know if you've ever suffered. Suffering is difficult. Suffering alone? Impossible. Standing firm in a culture that rejects and denies God? Difficult. Doing it alone? Impossible. Only Jesus could do that. What God has done here is surrounded Daniel with some very important things that you're going to need and I'm going to need.

They're called people. You see, what's happened in America is we've seen people as a means to an end. That is, when we meet somebody, we don't care about that person. We care what you do. What do you have? How much do you have? What influence do you have? How do I get from you what really is beneficial to me? Now, this has been going on for decades. It happened after the sexual revolution where we used people for pleasure. Now we use people for profit. It's largely a profit driven culture that we live in. When we meet somebody, how can I profit or triangulate or use you to get profit from you? People are now profit centers.

Well, this has some deep issues to it, because you no longer see people as people to be known and served and loved. But you begin to see people as objects to be used. And when you're using people, guess what happens to relationship. There is no relationship. And

then if you don't have any relationship, guess what happens to you. You're lonely.

Do you know, underneath the pandemic, the COVID pandemic, do you know that there's an ongoing epidemic that is ravaging the world? Britain, in fact, two years ago, hired it's first loneliness minister. Two years. They've had massive turnover. Now it's, I think, the most recent. And I'll get emails from England later about that. I think it's baroness Baron. Baroness Diana Barron. But they haven't moved the needle at all on loneliness. We're still profoundly lonely people, because we're using people for profit. Nobody feels heard anymore. Nobody feels known, nobody feels love, but we desperately want community, don't we?

This is why people come into church and they're like, Dave, I'm lonely. [Clapping.] Get me community and I want it now. And I'll say, well, man, community doesn't really work that way. You're not listening to me, clown. Give me community! That's what I pay you for. Well, I haven't tithed at all, but if I did, I'd pay you to get me community and I would like it to be friendly and warm and I want it to be of the same political persuasion as me and I want them to look like me and like the same fast foods and I want community that reflects me back to me, Dave. Because I love me some me.

[Chuckling.]

Now you won't say that. But that's what's going on in my own head. Now you know my own internal dialogue. So I'll be like, hey, Shafer, pastor Shafer, let's help get this person into community. So we will. We'll find out where you live and get you into community. And you'll come back the next week and be like, I didn't like that one.

[Laughter]

Way to lumpy. I like a soft community. That one was lumpy. So we'll say, well, okay. Try this one. You'll be like, okay. It better be better than the last one. So you go try that one and come back and be like, well, it was too hot. I like my porridge cold. And that one was hot. I mean they were almost charismatic. And I don't do that.

[Chuckling]

By this point, we're just going to love you well, give you a copy of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. There's not seven. I learned that last week. Three bears. And I'm going to give you a mirror so that you can go home and look at it and realize you haven't understood the good gifts that are all around you. You really haven't. In fact, most of us have learned to consume community and not create community. It's very sad. We come into a place and say, what can I get? What can I get? You're consuming community.

I want to tell you, God has given me and Brooke some of the best gifts I've ever had. In fact, right now, if I had an option between \$100 million and Hillside Fellowship, it wouldn't even be a question. I'd take Hillside Fellowship every time. You see? Because the bottom line and what I want you to write down is this. For where we're heading as a nation, for the darkness that is coming, community is not a luxury. It's a necessity. I want you to know that.

I spend and Shafer spend a lot of time trying to create community. But if you're consuming community, I can't create enough community for you to consume. You need to run to Jesus, consume Jesus so that you can create community and not constantly consume it. And I will tell you this as well. If your marriage isn't working out and you come and say, get me community, I'm going to look at you lovingly with tears in my eyes and say, you'll never have a community deeper than your marriage. It won't work. I'm so sorry. You can't get from another place what God intended for you to have in your marriage. So if we need to get you into Reengage, if we need to get you into Journey, if we need to get you healthy and get you help so you can create community instead of consuming community, we will.

But God has given you and us an incredible gift. I want you to write it down. Community is not a luxury. It is a necessity. There is coming a time where we won't be able to meet like this. And if you don't know your neighbors and if you don't have community, you're going to say the church has failed me. You are the church! We've been preaching and praying that you would meet people in your community

so that when they do shut us down, the church isn't impacted because you are the church in your community right there. Community isn't a luxury. It's a necessity. You can't do this alone. You can't. That's why even the Son of God came and he had his boys with him to walk through life together.

Now I'm already over time. Let's run through this next part. If that's too much to remember, just write down Netflix.

[Chuckling]

No, I'm dead serious. Listen, the greatest investment you'll ever make is sitting right around you. It's the greatest investment you'll ever make. Better than Netflix. Netflix has been the best performing stock over the last 10 years. Up over 4000%. An investment greater than that is sitting right around you. I love watching you guys pour into your families. Absolutely love it, because there is nothing greater than that investment.

[Clanking noise]

That's an amen.

[Laughter]

No, that's how I take it. Now watch this last one. I'm already over 45 seconds. Go ahead and pull up verse 8. Watch this. Watch where we go here. We've got perspective. If you don't understand that God's in control of who's in control, you're going to freak out. We've got people. If you're not investing in people, then you're missing the greatest investment that you could ever possibly invest in.

Now watch. This third one is just perseverance. One of the greatest tools that Daniel had. He is writing for over 45, I think 50 years. He's writing just a history. He had to persevere time and time and time again. I want you to see this. Verse 8. So all kinds of bad stuff is happening. And verse 8 always throws me off. I never expect it. "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the King's choice food or with the wine which he drank. So he sought

permission (humbled himself) from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself."

This is not what I expect. Every time I'm reading verse 8 and I'm reading through Daniel, I expect something holistically different. If you had just been carried off the land, seen your family killed, been brought into a pagan land that worships Satan, your name was changed, you were castrated and you were forced to study demonology and astrology, how it would read for me is: But David made up his mind to practice his ninja skills so he could assassinate Nebuchadnezzar. Anybody else?

[Laughter]

Thank you. David practiced his Kung-Fu over and over so if he ever got in the King's presence, with one swift blow he could crush the King's esophagus and end the reign of evil Nebuchadnezzar. That's how I would write the story, is it not? I think this is how you would write it, too. That's most of how us Texans feel. It's like, [breathing in deeply] come take it.

[Laughter]

Or is it, come and get it? I always get that one wrong. Is it come and get it?

Member: Come and take it.

Pastor Dave: Come and take it. Either way, I love it. It's got a snake on the flag. [Purring.]

[Laughter]

Ya'll are bad to the bone and I dig it. I dig your kind of badness.

[Laughter]

I do. I love it. I'm up here preaching and you're showing me your heat? I dig it. Come and take it. So we, as Texans, would have

written that in there. Right? So Taylor said, come and take it. I'm going to end Nebuchadnezzar, yo? "He made up his mind (or set it upon his heart) that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food?" So what? So what? So what, Daniel? What difference is that going to make? So you choose to go kosher. You've been captured. There's no country. I would expect to write, so Daniel gave up and he was like, man, it's been a bad day. Right?

Whenever you get castrated, it's a bad day. Amen?

[Laughter]

All the men said, amen.

[Laughter]

It's just been a tough day and I'm not feeling good about it. So I'm just going to go with the flow. Daniel doesn't. He made up his mind to do what he could do. He had very little power; very little influence. What can you do? You're a prisoner. They've changed your name. I know what I can do. I'll go ask permission if I can just be kosher. Eat vegetables. I can't do anything else. I mean, that's pretty much it.

You see, in America, when things don't go our way and when we see evil legislation being passed, when we see very bad things happening, we want something big to happen, don't we?! Maybe election will do it! We'll get our guy in! We'll get our house and Senate and all congress together! We'll get it taken care of! We'll do something big! When God wants to do something big, guess what? He loves to start super duper small. Like the decision, are you willing to follow me today? Are you willing to take that next step with me and have your character formed in the image of Jesus Christ?

See, most of us have never taken a class on carpology. Anybody ever study carpology? Botany? See there's not much money in it unless you're growing cannabis . . .

[Laughter]

Pot. Sorry. My addict friends are like, Dave, too far.

[Laughter]

We're all anonymous. It's okay.

There really isn't. I took it because I was bored and was like, botany sounds cool. And then you get into botany and study carpology and you realize, do you know in all of nature, whenever you study seeds, whenever God wants to do something big, he starts with a seed. It's super small. For Brooke's 40th birthday, Brooke's here, we took her -- we went to the Redwoods in California. Sequoia dendrin giganteum. Ever heard of it? That's Latin. I didn't learn that in public school. That was in private school before I got kicked out.

[Chuckling]

This is a literal sequoia dendrin giganteum seed. When God wants to do something really, really, really big, he tends to go really small and he'll plant a seed and say . . .

[Jingling]

Either somebody brought in a wind chime or that's somebody's phone. Or it might be the Spirit. We don't know.

[Laughter]

We really don't know. Could be that special day.

[Laughter]

So when he wants to go big, he goes small. He puts something like this into the ground and he says, watch this. You're not going to believe it. Keep watching.

[Laughter]

Ahh. Keep watching.

[Laughter]

But see, we have a 28 second attention span. We're like, forget that. See, you put this seed in the ground and it's going to take about 1,000 years before you really stand in amazement. But when you go to the Redwoods and see the sequoias, it almost takes your breath away, doesn't it? You're standing there surrounded. You see, when God wanted to do something really big, really, really big in Babylon, he came to Daniel and said, are you willing to take this next step? What do you want me to do? Just trust me to form your character. Are you willing? Are you willing just to choose not to defile yourself?

What difference will that make?! That can't possibly make any difference at all! Trust me Daniel. It's tiny. It's a tiny step, but I love to work through tiny steps. You see, this is why we tend to love to look at big things, elections and all kinds of things. He wants us to look at our heart and say, Lord Jesus, what's the next step you want me to take? He'll do the big things. He carries it out. It's profound.

So Daniel, he knew that God's in control of who's in control. He knew that community wasn't a luxury. It was a necessity. And he knew that God loves to grow things. There's a reason Daniel doesn't start out with the lion's den. Or you're not there. There's a reason it doesn't start out with the fiery furnace. Those take time. You know how much courage that would take? You know how much character that would take? When the whole nation is bowing down, do you know how much courage and character and conviction it would take to stand up? Where did that start? One little decision.

You see, he knows what he's got for me in the future. You may say, Dave, this is all going south. You're going to get arrested for preaching the gospel. I guarantee it at some point. Praise God! I've been arrested for a lot of dumb stuff?

[Laughter]

Have I shared some of that with you? Praise God. Maybe there will be an opportunity to get arrested for something beautiful. To spend

time behind bars for the gospel. That's bucket list stuff. But he knows it comes one decision at a time. What is he asking? What step is he asking you to take today? I'm 9 minutes over so I'm going to land the plane.

Pull up verse 9 and be ready to pull up verse 17. You see, when you're willing to take that little step, just one little step of obedience, whatever he's asking you today, it may be to apologize or ask your spouse for forgiveness. Whatever that little step is, when you take that little step, it provides an opportunity for God to show up. When you step up, it provides opportunity for God to show up. Watch this. Watch verse 9.

So Daniel asked permission. Can I go kosher? Verse 9. What happens? You see the verb there? "Now God granted Daniel favor." Pull up verse, I think it's 17. As these four, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel were going after they were tested for the food. "As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence . . ." Because they were willing to humble themselves and take that next step. Even in days of darkness, God showed up. The enemy wants you to give up and go with the flow. It is how he rolls.

You see, if he can get you to give up and go with the flow, he's got you. Just give up! What difference does it make if you love your spouse, love your family, love your neighbor and love your community? The whole nation is spinning out of control! What difference does it make? God says, just trust me. Watch this. I'm doing something that you wouldn't understand even if I told you. But if you take that next step, you choose not to give up, you persevere, it gives opportunity for God to show up. And when God shows up, man, it strengthens you inside, doesn't it.

You say, Dave, how do you get up and preach like week in and week out? You got people against you. Man, it's a joy. Have I ever told you about the worst day of my life? Bottom fell out. I admitted my alcoholism. I had no job. I had no insurance. I had no money. I had less than no money. I had debt. You ever been there? You've got nothing. You've got less than nothing and no prospects.

My prayer that morning was, God help. I don't know what to do. Help. You know when you provide opportunities and you begin to persevere, God shows up. How will he show up for you? I don't know. That day, a friend showed up. I didn't even know he was going to show up. He said, get in the car. I had a dream. I'm not a charismatic. I was like, man, that's weird. Honestly, I was like, where are we going? He's like, I'm not sure, but I know where I'm supposed to turn right.

We got in the car. You know what God did for me that day? He provided all the drug and rehabilitation I needed for free. The president was standing outside. He said, I don't even meet patients, but I knew I was supposed to stand out here and meet somebody. Nice to meet you. I'm going to make it all available for free. You see, when you choose to persevere and not give up, it allows God to show up. And when God shows up, you begin to grow up. And the world looks and says, what is this courage and conviction? And you get to say, man, our God is in control of who's in control.

Community is not a luxury. It's a necessity and my God loves to grow things. You see, this is how you shine brightly in a dark day. If you do these things, I guarantee you, you'll be wise. You'll be wise. You may look at America and say, Dave, it's horrible. It's bad. It is dark as night. Remember. Remember, Hillside, the darker the night, the brighter the light. He wants to shine through you today. He wants to shine through you to a nation that desperately needs to know our God is really good.

What's the next step he would have you take today? We're going to sing two songs to him. We're going to stand. We're going to celebrate him. Would you ask him, Lord, what is the next step you would have me take and follow him in that little step knowing that he loves to grow things. Let me pray.

Father God, thanks for this morning and the time that we've had to look at your word. I pray that you would take it, plant those seeds in our heart as we look out at a nation that seems to be spinning out of control. Would you remind us that you're in control of who's in

control. You raise kings up and you bring them down. Father, would you remind us and strengthen us to realize that community isn't a luxury? It's a necessity. And teach us how to love one another really well being totally humble and gentle, loving each other fervently from the heart.

And Father, would you grow us in patience, knowing that you love to grow things? Would you give us a perspective and eyes to see what you're doing so we can celebrate you in a world that truly is filled with resentment and bitterness? I pray that we'd be filled with rejoicing and blessing because you're a good father to us. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[End]