

# BIGGER THAN BABYLON

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## Thrive

Daniel 1 // Craig Smith

April 8, 2018

**Craig //** Good morning. Welcome to Mission Hills. So glad you are here for the launch of our new series, “Thrive.” We are going to be spending the next few months going chapter by chapter through one of what I think is one of the most interesting books in the Bible. That is the book of Daniel. Some of you already know a lot about Daniel. Some of you are just finding out there is a book called “Daniel” in the Bible, and that’s awesome. It doesn’t matter what end of the spectrum you are on. God’s going to have some powerful things to speak into your life, and to understand what it means to thrive as people of faith in a culture that, honestly, that’s not necessarily all that conducive to living as people of faith.

Regardless of where you are in the spectrum, let me give you three things that I think are important to understand about the book of Daniel to get out of it everything that God wants to give you in this series. The first thing is, Daniel is a prophetic book. It was written by a prophet. When we think prophet we immediately think people that saw the what? Yeah, they saw the future. So prophecy often involves predictions about things that are going to happen in the future, and we definitely see that in the book of Daniel, but it also tends to give encouragement to God’s people, and it uses vivid language symbols, and imagery to help communicate that encouragement, and because prophecy is intended not just to inform the mind, but it’s intended to capture the heart, and so we are going to see a lot of that kind of stuff going on, but certainly there are some predictions in the book of Daniel, which leads me to the second thing that you need to know about Daniel, and that is that most of Daniel’s prophecies have already been fulfilled. Daniel was writing in the 600 BC, and an awful lot of what Daniel predicted came to pass in the centuries leading up to, and including, the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Daniel had a lot to say about Jesus, so when Jesus came on the scene, a great many of his prophecies came to their fulfillment. Not all of them. There are certainly some prophecies in Daniel that still speak to what we call the end times, that haven’t taken place yet, but a lot of them have been fulfilled and you might go, then what’s the fun in that, right? What’s the point of reading a prophecy that’s already been fulfilled? What you need to understand is that God never gives prophecy just to give information. He gives prophecy in order to communicate something important to his people. What God says about the future is always meant to help his people thrive in the present. You need to understand that to understand any book of prophecy in the Bible, but especially Daniel. What God says about the future is always meant to help his people thrive in the present, to face our circumstances with hope and with wisdom and humility. See, God doesn’t want us to just survive. He doesn’t want us to just get through our circumstances. He wants us to thrive in them. God doesn’t want us to just survive. He wants us to thrive by facing circumstances with hope, humility and wisdom, and when we do that, what happens is, we set the stage for God to bless us in whatever way he chooses.

We don’t just get through our circumstances, but we thrive in the middle of them. That’s what we are going to be focusing on in the book of Daniel, those principles that allow us to thrive as God’s people in our circumstances. So here’s some stuff that we are not going to be doing. We are not going to be handing out complicated charts where we try to connect all of the prophecies to Daniel and get them all in the right line. We are not going to be doing that. We are not going to be trying to figure out how today’s headlines fit into the prophecies of the book of Daniel, and we are absolutely, positively not, no way, no how, going to be making any guesses about when Jesus is coming back based on the prophecies of Daniel.

I’m not saying anything’s wrong with that. If that’s something that you really enjoy, that’s fine, but that’s not what we are going to be focusing on in this series. We are going to focus on the principles that Daniel teaches us about what it means to thrive as God’s people in difficult circumstances, which leads me to the third thing you need to know about Daniel, and that is what his circumstances were like. You see, Daniel’s faith caused friction with the culture he was immersed in. It caused friction with the surrounding culture just like ours. The book of Daniel is very appropriate for us today because the reality is that more and more Christian faith causes friction with the culture that we are surrounded by. That wasn’t always true. There was a time when western culture was pretty closely aligned with Christianity. Almost as much that people thought to be part of the western world means to be Christian. Well, that’s not true. I would actually argue that there are dangers that come from that kind of thinking. Because people think they were Christian just because they spent a lot of time in a Christian culture. As I said before, you can spend a lot of time at Chipotle. It doesn’t make you a burrito, okay?

Just growing up in a Christian culture doesn’t make you a Christian. There is some danger in thinking that being part of the western culture made you a Christian, but the reality is, that’s not true anymore. This isn’t a Christian culture. In fact, western culture is more and more in friction with the Christian faith. It’s not true that if you went back a hundred years ago that was the way it was, or even 50 or 25 year ago, but now that

ship has sailed. The era has changed. For instance, check this out. 42% of American adults believe that people of faith have no part to play in addressing the challenges that our culture faces. 42%. What's interesting about that to me is that 70% of American adults claim to be people of faith. They claim to be followers of Jesus in some way or form, and yet 42% of American adults say that people of faith, which would include them, apparently, have no part to play in dealing with our culture's issues.

Now, what that really means is they don't think faith has anything to do with it. They think faith is irrelevant, right? They think faith is irrelevant. How about this -- 60%, 60% of American adults believe that sharing your faith with another person in the hopes that they will become followers of Jesus is extreme behavior. 60%. You understand that sharing your faith with somebody in the hope that they'll become followers of Jesus, we have a word for that in Christianity. It's called evangelism, and it's one of the central practices of the Christian faith. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said to his disciples, go into all of the world and make disciples of all nations. Teach them to obey everything I have taught you. That's evangelism. It's sharing the good news of what Jesus did on the cross to pay for our sins. He rose from the dead to give us new life through faith. Telling that good news to people, 60% of our people say that makes you into a religious extremist.

By the way, the other people that fall into the religious extremist category? Islamic terrorism. Okay? Now they are not saying it's the same thing, but it's in the same bucket. It's extreme religion, or how about this, 11% of American adults now, based on a recent survey, 11% believe that reading your Bible silently in a public place, that's extreme behavior. Forget evangelism. Forget speaking the truth of who Jesus is, just having your Bible open and reading it silently in a public place, 11% of our population believes that, that is extremist behavior, right? So we just have to come to grips with the reality, and the reality is this. Our culture believes that practicing Christians are irrelevant and extreme, okay? Our culture believes that practicing Christians are irrelevant and extreme. If you consider yourself a practicing Christian, welcome to the club. You are irrelevant, and you are extreme. And that might seem a little depressing, but here's the good news -- it's nothing new.

This has always been the case to people that commit their lives and their allegiance to God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and what we are going to see in the book of Daniel that it's not only possible to survive in a culture like that, but to thrive in a culture like that. To thrive in a way that not only allows you to remain faithful, but to actually have a huge impact on the culture itself, and that's what we are going to be focusing on in this series. Let's get started. Why don't you go ahead and join me in the book of Daniel. If you are using a physical Bible, you will find that about three quarters of the way through. If you are using a digital Bible -- that means nothing. Just look up Daniel.

[Laughter]

Now 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 delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and he put in the treasure house of his god. So understand what's happened here, the people of God have been conquered by the Babylonian army. The people of God have been besieged by the Babylonian army, and they have been defeated, and the king of Judah, Judah is the last of the 12 tribes that's still in existence at this point. The king has been delivered into the hands of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and basically, Israel is no more at this point. The people are scattered throughout the world. That's what happened.

But what happened is not nearly as important as why it happened. And what Daniel says here about why that happened is perhaps the most important thing to set the stage for everything else we'll see in the book of Daniel. What Daniel says about why this happened sets the stage for him to be able to react to circumstances in the way that we are going to see him react. Did you catch what he said about why it happened? And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hands. That's why it happened. It didn't happen because the Babylonians had a bigger, badder army. It didn't happen because they are had better tactics. It didn't happen because they did a sneak attack and they took them -- no, no, no. It happened because God delivered them into Nebuchadnezzar's hands. God allowed it to happen. Now, there's a reason for that. It's not an arbitrary decision on God's part.

At this point Israel has been in disobedience against God for centuries, and we are told in scripture, Jehoiakim their king at this point, he was an evil man. Okay, so there's a reason for that. What's interesting is that Daniel doesn't focus on the reasons. He doesn't give an explanation about why this happened. He just kinda drills down to this bedrock truth. He says it only happened because God allowed it. God delivered them into his hands.

In other words, it could never have happened if God hadn't let it happen, because Daniel believes that God is bigger than Babylon. As big and bad and scary as Babylon might be, the reality is that Daniel knows that God is bigger than Babylon. Babylon has no power apart from what God allows it, and that is the foundation for everything we are going to see Daniel do throughout this book.

That is the foundation that allows Daniel to respond to his circumstances in a way that allows him to thrive. Allows him to deal with those circumstances with hope and humility and wisdom, which sets the stage for God to bless him in whatever way God chooses. Daniel is able to do all of that because he knows that God is bigger than Babylon. That is our first foundational principle for thriving. We can thrive as God's people, only when we remember that God is bigger than our Babylon. Do you understand that? Our God is bigger than our Babylon. What is your Babylon? For the metaphor impaired, when I say "our Babylon" I mean whatever big, scary thing you are facing. We all face those on a regular basis, don't we?

In fact, Let's do this right now. I would love for you to grab a piece of paper or whatever device you are using, and get yourself to a place where you can write, and I want you to think right now for a moment and say what's the big scary thing that I'm facing? What am I facing that feels overwhelming? What's my Babylon right now? I'm not kidding. I really want you to write that down. I want you to jot that down. You see, I want this to be a super practical series, and to do that, I think we need to make it personal, we need to make it concrete, so what is your Babylon? What is the big scary thing you are facing? I want you to jot it down. If it comes to you throughout this message, just go ahead and take the time to jot that down. If you already have it written down, I want you to look at that and say, my God is bigger than that. In fact, I know it's a little bit cheesy, but let's do it together out loud, can we? Look at that big, scary thing you are facing and say, my God is bigger than that.

My God is bigger than that. Do you believe that? You need to, because if you don't, you are not going to be able to respond to that in a way that's going to allow you not just to survive, but to thrive, okay? We can thrive as God's people only when we remember that God is bigger than our Babylon. Unfortunately, that reality, that truth about God's greatness is the very truth that Babylon works really hard to cause us to forget. And then the king, that's Nebuchadnezzar, the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility -- young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table.

They were to be trained for three years, and after that, they were to enter the king's service. Among those who were chosen were some from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names. To Daniel, the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah, Shadrach, to Mishael, Meshach, and to Azariah, Abednego. What you need to understand is that we are seeing there is a deliberate strategy on the part of Babylon to get Daniel and his friends to switch teams, to switch their allegiance from their faith, their God and their people, and to give them to Babylon, to the king, and to the gods of Baal. It's a deliberate strategy to get them to do that. There are four tactics they are using, and I think they are interesting, because I think we can see all four of the tactics in operation in our own lives today, these attempts to get us to shift our allegiance, to get us to switch teams. The first technique we see is to separate them from the support of a community of God's people. See for Babylon, what they did, they took them out of Israel, and they brought them to the capital of Babylon, but not just into the capital of Babylon surrounded by Babylonians, they brought them into the king's court, surrounded by pagan religious leaders.

That was the new culture they were living in. But what they were doing, they were separating them from the support of a community of God's people. As long as they had that support, as long as they had those people around them, they could be reminded -- no, no, no. Here is the truth about who God is. Here is what it looks like to live faithfully, which would allow them to thrive, but they tried to break that support network. It was intentional. The same thing happens to us today, doesn't it? The world works pretty hard to separate us from a community of God's people. I know we talked about this before, but it's just such an interesting statistic. 25 years ago, regular church attendance meant three times a month. It's about one right now. People that say I go regularly, it's one time a month. It's technically 1.4, but I don't know how you go to church 0.4 times, so --

But you see what's happened, more and more people say I'm regularly connected to a network of God's people if I go one time a month. That's not really being connect today a supportive community of God's people. It's just not. Why does that happen? Well, there are all kinds of thing the world has done. We have soccer games on Sunday. We have sporting things that happen on Sunday. There are so many different things that you go, yeah, yeah. It's just not feasible. It's not realistic. What's happening is there is this separation. It didn't work in Daniel's case, because Daniel, as we see as the book continues, Daniel recreated that community on a smaller scale. Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they did everything together. You are going to see that they basically formed what we here at Mission Hills call a Life Group. They met on a regular basis. They prayed together. They talked together. That's why we push Life Groups so hard here at Mission Hills because we know that the regular connection to a supportive community of God's people is necessary to thrive as people of faith in a culture where our faith creates friction.

So if you are not part of a Life Group, I really strongly encourage you to do what Daniel did, and to find that small group, find that community of people who can remind you regularly who God is, and hold you accountable for what it looks like to follow Him faithfully. If you are not part of a small group, you can do it online, you can go back to the welcome center on the way out and say, I think I need to be part of a Life Group, and they would love to get you connected, but understand that there is an impulse, a deliberate strategy on the part of the world just like Babylon's, to separate us from the support of a community of God's people.

The second tactic was to immerse them in a new world's view, to fill their heads with information that was contradictory to the truth of God's word, and the truth of who God is, and what it meant to be God's people. They tried to fill their heads of that. In the case of Babylon, they brought them in, and they said we are going to teach you the literature and language of the Babylonians. They gave them three years to do that. Three years honestly is hardly enough. The Babylonian language is very complicated. They use cuneiform writing, there are all kinds of symbols, hundreds of symbols you had to memorize, all kinds of rules for the way they work together. So what they did was to immerse them day and night in this language, and the way that the Babylonians taught their language was to make people copy their literature, so hour after hour day after day they copied the literature of the Babylonians, but guess what? The literature of the Babylonians was always religious. It was the stories of their gods. It was the stories of their religion. What was happening is that Daniel's friends were absolutely immersed every day in a new way of thinking about the world, a pagan way of thinking about the world.

The reality is, the more of that kind of stuff you take in, the more it begins to affect you. It's an old program adage. It says garbage in, garbage out. You pour this kind of stuff in, it begins to make a difference in the way we think about things, in the way we see the world, what we think is true. The world does this to us all the time, doesn't it? I mean more and more, the Christian faith and the Christian message are divorced from the reality of our culture. I'm not saying woe is me. I'm not whining about it. I'm saying we have to recognize it as a reality. More and more the Gospel, and the reality of the Christian faith is not a reality of the part of our language of our culture, but we spend 98 or 99% of our time in life out in the world where we don't hear that truth anymore. Our schools have no place for prayer. They are no place for teaching on creation. They have no place for any of that stuff. It makes a difference. It begins to affect us. I would argue that the only reason it didn't cause Daniel and his friends to change teams is because of that group that they had. They met together and they evaluated what they were hearing, and they reminded each other of the truth.

I sent my kids to public high school. They were immersed in that worldview. But we talked about it. When they came home at night, we would go, what did you learn today? That's interesting. Let's talk about that. How does that compare to what scripture says? How do we know what's true? How does that impact things? We constantly debriefed it. Daniel and his friends, I'm certain, were doing the same kind of thing, so again, it's really critical that you be connected to a community of faith, and even more important to a small group where you can have those debrief conversations, because otherwise the immersion in another worldview will impact the way you think about things. Third thing, third tactic they used was to make compromise look like a privilege. You see, they were assigned food from the king's own table. What you need to understand is that in the ancient world, eating meals at somebody's table was a big deal. When you ate at the king's table, what you basically were doing was declares allegiance to him, so eating the king's food, drinking the king's wine was to say, I'm on your team, but -- in Babylon, the king was a representative of the Babylonian gods so to declare allegiance to the king by eating his choice food, his special food was really to declare allegiance to his gods.

It would have been a compromise of their faith to do that, but you need to understand that -- it's pretty hard to say no to, wasn't it? It wasn't just a compromise. It was a privilege. Do you understand how honored you are to be given food from the king's own table? You are so privileged. No one gets this opportunity, but the king has decided that you are worthy of this special honor. That gets a lot harder to say no to, doesn't it? Now it's not just a compromise. Now it's a privilege. I had a friend a couple of years ago. He works for the company that produces the child playground things, like the mushrooms and pirate ships and stuff like that in amusement parks? And his company was working with an amusement park in Korea to set up a deal, and so they came to the point of the negotiations where they went over -- the Americans went over, and they had a big three-day summit, and they signed the deal, and there was a big celebration dinner, and in the midst of the celebration the president of the Korean company did this, and my friend looked and saw coming through the doors a line of women dressed very provocatively. There was one for each of the American men.

And they came in, and they sat down on their laps, and the Korean president said, she's our gift to you for the night. I kid you not. We wanted to bless you with this gift, he said. We wanted to honor you with this gift. My friend is a Christian. He's a follower of Jesus. He's a devoted husband. He's a great father. That was a difficult place to be in, because obviously, it was a compromise. Every second that ticked away that he didn't do something was a compromise, but it was made all that harder because it was presented as an honor. It was presented as a privilege. He did the right thing. He pushed her off. He stood up. He said I'm a follower of Jesus. That's wrong, and I can't have anything to do with that, and he left. And I was so proud of him, not only because he did the right thing, but I understood how hard it was at that moment. It wasn't just that he rejected a compromise, but he did so at a cost. And the cost was higher because it was presented as though it was a privilege.

I don't know if you have ever had an experience, not quite like that, hopefully not, but where you are being asked to compromise your faith, your commitment, your allegiance to Christ, and it's presented almost as a privilege to be able to do so. I had a friend who once was told we think you are an up and comer in the company, if you would just help us with some adjustments to the accounting books. That will prove to us that you are a team player. It will prove to us that you have legs in this company. See, it's presented as a privilege. Maybe you have had something like that on some scale. It's a tactic that's used to get your eyes off the fact that it's a compromise, and get your eyes thinking, but it's a privilege, which makes it all that much harder to resist.

There was a fourth tactic that the Babylonians used, and that was to redefine their sense of identity. See the Babylonians changed their names. In the ancient world, names had a lot to do with your sense of your identity, and Daniel and his friend's names involved the statement about their identity as followers of God, of Yahweh. Yahweh is the personal name of God in Hebrew, and all four of them had names that related to that faith. Daniel means, God is my judge. Hananiah means Yahweh has been gracious. Mishael means who is like God, or who is what God is? Azariah means Yahweh has been kind. Yahweh has helped. All of them had names that reminded them of who they were in God. The Babylonians went, no, no, no. We are not going to call you that. They changed their names. In each case they got rid of their name in God, and they gave them something that in some form involves the name of the Babylonian gods. They are changing their identity.

The world does this to us all the time, doesn't it? See, if you are a follower of Christ, the bedrock of your identity is that fact that you are a follower of Christ. Everything else is secondary. Everything else is insignificant compared to that reality that you are a follower of Christ, but the world constantly works to say, no, no, no. This is where your identity belongs -- you're an athlete. You're really good at school. You're married. You are a good husband. You are a good wife. You are a good father. All of those are fine things, but they are not your identity. They emerge from your identity as followers of Christ. No, no, no, no. It's the house you live in. It's the car you drive. It's the second vacation home. It's the kind

of stuff you accumulate. It's where you are in the company. It's the title you have. It's the way people think about you. It's all of these things, and I get that. I understand it. I struggle with it myself. If you want to know where I struggle, where the world tempts me to go here's where your identity really is -- it's how many people showed up at Easter? What does attendance look like at church? I have to constantly go, that has nothing to do with who I am.

Who I am is a follower of Jesus, and that's it. The world goes, no, no, no. It's how many people told you they liked last week's sermon. That's how you know who you are and how you are doing. Or maybe it's how many people sent you e-mails they didn't like last week's sermon? What happens is you are in this constant struggle for who am I? I have to constantly go, no, no, no. I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. That's it. That's all that matter. That is all that counts, but the world constantly struggles to get you to redefine your identity, because once you have redefined your identity, it's not that hard to get you to switch teams. But Daniel, Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way. Daniel understood they were asking him to switch teams.

The reason he said food and wine and drinking the king's food and wine is defilement, there are probably two pieces to it. Understand that defilement is a religious word, okay? He knew that by drinking the king's food and wine he would be compromising his faith. There are two reasons for that. The first is that there are Jewish dietary laws. The Old Testament gives some restrictions and says that his faithful people can't eat certain kinds of food or food prepared in certain ways. Anything that violated those things was called nonkosher. Almost certainly the Babylonian king's choice food would have involved food that was nonkosher. So by eating it, they would have been breaking the Old Testament commandments. That would have been a compromise to their faith, but I don't think it's just that because there's no Old Testament commandments against wine. There is no such thing as nonkosher wine, and yet Daniel is concerned about drinking the wine too, and that's because as I said earlier, he understood to eat the king's food and wine was to declare allegiance to the king.

Part of the reason I say that is because there's an interesting word that's used. When he talks about the choice food, it's kind of an unusual term. It shows up later in the book of Daniel to say this that the betrayal is ten times worse when it comes from somebody that's eaten the king's choice food, because the eating of that food, the drinking of that wine, it was a statement of allegiance to that king and ultimately to the gods that king represented, and so Daniel said, I can't defile myself. I can't compromise my faith by having this king's food. I won't do it. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, I'm afraid of my lord the king who was assigned the food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age. The king would then have my head because of you. You understand that what he's saying is this. He's saying, compromise is the only way to succeed here. Compromise is the only way to survive, let alone thrive.

You have to do it. There's no other way. Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, please, test your servants for ten days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink, and then compare our appearance to that of the young men that eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. And so he agreed to this, and he tested them for ten days. Now at the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food, and so the guard took away their choice food and the wine that they were to drink and he gave them vegetables instead. You understand what's happening here, right? This is a command from God that we should only eat vegetables. I'm glad you are laughing.

There is a diet out there called "the Daniel diet" that looks at what happened here and says, see? They thrived. They were physically so healthy because they only ate vegetables, and only drank water. Now listen, if you are a vegetarian, that's fine. I'm not saying anything about that, but that's not what happening here. In fact that misses the point entirely. Their health was not a natural result of their diet, it was a supernatural result of their decision, right? It wasn't a natural result of the food they ate. It was a natural result of their decision not to compromise their faith. Because they refused to compromise their faith, God blessed them--and not just physically. To these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning, and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar, and the king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of king Cyrus.

God blessed them supernaturally, not just physically, but intellectually. He gave them, honestly, through all of these blessings, he gave them what we would call worldly success. They didn't just survive, they thrived. They got positions and power and influence and significance. God gave them worldly success because of their refusal to compromise. And here we find the second all important lesson for what it means to thrive as people of faith in a hostile culture. We thrive only when we refuse to compromise our allegiance to Jesus. Refusing to compromise our allegiance to Jesus is what sets the stage for God to bless us in whatever way he chooses. And I say whatever way he chooses because there is a temptation, I think, at this point to say, oh, yeah, it's a formula. If you refuse to compromise, God will give you worldly success just like he did Daniel and his friends, right? Refusing to compromise my faith means worldly success automatically, right? It really doesn't. I'm sorry. That's how God chose to bless them, but it's not necessarily how he blesses everyone. It's not a formula.

The Bible doesn't contain any promise that says as long as you are obedient, and as long as you refuse to compromise your allegiance to Jesus, you will automatically have academic success and financial wealth and high positions in companies, and a stellar career, and perfect kids, and a

perfect husband and perfect wife -- God doesn't promise that. In fact, honestly, the Bible contains more promises that if you remain faithful to Jesus, you will experience trouble in this life. I'm sorry. I cannot promise that refusing to compromise your faith will necessarily mean worldly success. God might bless it that way, but there is no guarantee of that. But I can guarantee you this, a refusal to compromise your faith, your allegiance to Jesus is what sets the stage for God to bless you in whatever way he chooses. And that may involve worldly success, but even if it doesn't, it means at the end of this life, you will be blessed in ways that will make worldly success here and now look like a joke.

That's what you are guaranteed. You are guaranteed salvation. You are guaranteed eternal life in the presence of God. You are guaranteed joy and peace and happiness and significance and meaning in such abundance, that it makes worldly success, for the few years you have on this earth, makes it look like a joke, a cheap imitation of real success. That is what is promised to you if you will refuse to compromise your faith in Jesus. That's thriving. We thrive only -- only in this life and the next when we refuse to compromise our faith in Jesus.

How do we do that? Let me give you four things. The first is this. It requires a relationship with God who is bigger than your Babylon. That is the first key to not compromising your allegiance to Christ. You have to have a relationship with a God that is bigger than your Babylon. Whatever you wrote down, whatever might have occurred to you since then, you are like that's the big scary thing I'm facing, you can tell yourself every day, God is bigger than that thing, and it is true, but to really experience the power of God that will allow you to live out that knowledge, to thrive in the midst of that difficult circumstance, that requires a relationship with that big, big, big God. If you are here today and you are going, I don't know that I have that relationship. I don't know how to have a relationship with God, then I would encourage you to figure it out. I'll be down here after the service. There will be other people down here. If you know you don't have a relationship with God and you want one, you can have it today, and we would love to tell you how. Come seek us out.

You have to have the relationship, because it's relationship that allows God's power to flow into you, which is what gives you the strength to avoid compromise. Second thing you need to have to avoid compromise, you have to figure out a way to constantly remind yourself that God is bigger than your Babylon. It's easy to forget. The world has all of these tactics that look to take us away from that reality. We have to figure out some way to constantly be reminding ourselves. It might be as simple as what I do. In my daily prayer list I have a list of things that I'm struggling with, God. Here are the things that feel big and scary right now. And in the bottom in bold text, highlighted in yellow so it jumps off the page is the simple statement, God is bigger than these things. And every time I pray through those things, I see that truth and I go, yes, that's true, and I begin my day with the reminder of the knowledge that my God is bigger than my Babylon. You have to find some way of doing that on a regular basis. Third thing you need, you need to courage to reject compromise at any cost. At the end of the day, the knowledge is the foundation. The way we live in light of that knowledge, we have courage. We go, I'm going to refuse to compromise even though the world is going to say, hey, if you don't compromise, it will cost you. There's going to be a fee that we charge. There's going to be a price that we exact. We have to have the courage to go, it doesn't matter. It does not matter. I would argue that, that courage comes not only from a relationship with God, but from a relationship with His people, and so the fourth thing you need, you need a community to keep you strong.

You need to be part of a community of faith that reminds you of the truth of who God is, and what it means to be faithful to Him. You need that regular reminder. You need to come to church regularly. It's really important to me that you be here on a regular basis because my identity is rooted --

[Laughter]

No, it's not. I don't say that for me. I say that for you because I know it matters. The regularity with which we assemble with God's people directly correlates with the consistency with which we live faithfully. I also encourage you to get involved in a Life Group. Get involved in a Life Group. We thrive as God's people only when we refuse to compromise our allegiance to Jesus. So, couple of questions. One is a repeat? What's your Babylon? What is the big scary thing you are facing? It's really powerful to talk about that with somebody. Here's the thing, go out to dinner after church today and talk to your husband, your wife, your friend or your kids. Do it as a family or do it as a Life Group conversation. What's the Babylon you are facing? Just be honest about it. Second question, where is the world most pressuring you to compromise your allegiance to Jesus? Where do you feel that pressure the most? Where is it most acute? You might even think, what form is that pressure taking? We saw four things here that Babylon used, four tactics.

I think we see those tactics all the time. You might frame your conversation that way. Which of these four tactics am I really feeling pressure from right now? And then finally, what do you need to do to remember that God is bigger than your Babylon? What step are you going to take this week to begin living in the constant reminder that your God is bigger than your Babylon? Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for loving us enough to die on the cross for us, rising from the death as we celebrated last week, and to know that sin can be forgiven, that there is hope, and that there is power, and Lord, ultimately, what you prove to us is that our God is bigger than our Babylon, that your love is bigger than the hard, scary big things that we face. You are bigger than our Babylon. Lord, help us to live in light of that truth. Give us the courage to reject compromise at any cost so that we can thrive as your people. In Jesus name, amen.