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SERMON TITLE	Thriving in a Godless Culture
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SERIES	
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DATE	9/19/2021
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KEY SCRIPTURE	Daniel 1
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SYNOPSIS	Daniel shows us how to survive, thrive and even gain influence in a Godless culture.
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HIGHLIGHTS	
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☞ Thriving in a Godless Culture

☞ --Greg Surrat (a few years ago at National Convention) ... **God is Gideonizing the Church.**

-- Ed Stetzer... **Not everyone who uses the word "Christian" is using it the same way.** There are three broad categories of Americans who refer to themselves as Christians. **Cultural Christians** are simply those who, when asked, say they are a Christian rather than say they are an atheist or Jewish. The second type is what I call a **Congregational Christian**. This person generally does not really have a deep commitment, but they will refer to themselves as Christians because they have some loose connection to a church. Then, there are **Convictional Christians**, which are those people who self-identify as Christian and orient their life around their faith in Christ.

☞ **It is beginning to cost something to be a Christian in America**—not as much as in many places in the world or in much of history, but more than it used to.

There was a time when nearly everyone in America considered themselves Christian. Not so today. America is becoming less and less Christian very rapidly. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of people who call themselves Christian has declined by 12 percent in the last decade alone. And, those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular has risen by 9 percent in the same time period. There's a very good chance your next-door neighbor is not a believer. In fact, our American culture is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity. Simply quoting the Bible can be considered hate speech by many in today's world. It takes a stronger determination to walk in Christlike faith nowadays. While this is frustrating and sometimes flat out scary, it's no real surprise. The Bible predicted this condition...

☞ 2 Timothy 3:1-5

But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days.** 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God- 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.

☞ Matthew 24:9-12

you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and **you will be hated** by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold

While we are living in these Last Days we pray for revival and a great awakening in America. God may still pour out his spirit and heal our land one more time. **But what if things become even worse?**

There was a day when Christianity was dominant, widely accepted and revered, but today it's



entirely different. Now Christianity is barely tolerated and there are many who want to eliminate our influence altogether. And they are making many successful strides forward.

Daniel lived in a similar (actually, much worse) situation...

☞ **Daniel 1:1-2**

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand

Daniel was amongst the royal nobility in Israel, but now was cut off from that and was forced to learn the ways of the heathen. Babylon is the epitome of all evil; and Nebuchadnezzar was the worst. And **Daniel's religion was completely subjugated to the Babylonian culture.** There was no more temple worship; no more God-ordained sacrifices and festivals. It was all over. He and his three friends couldn't even keep their Israeli names.

Daniel ("God is my judge") was changed to Belteshazzar ("Bel protect his life"). Bel was the name of a Babylonian god. Hananiah ("Jehovah is gracious") became Shadrach ("the command of the moon god"); Mishael ("Who is like God?") became Meshach ("who is like Aku," one of the heathen gods); and Azariah ("Jehovah is my helper") became Abed-nego ("the servant of Nego," another heathen god). How would you like to be forcibly renamed Lucifer, Beelzebub, or Satan?

These godly young men were given to the chief court official to be trained in Babylonian or Chaldean language and literature. The KJV says this official was the master of the king's eunuchs which strongly suggests that they were castrated to join the group. So, we can see that Daniel and his friends were about as low as they could go. Virtually every part of their personal identity was stripped away.

They were forced to not only give up their faith, but to learn the customs of their new king in order to serve him. Make no mistake, this was not just about how to approach the king and how to talk to him; this was about the Babylonian ways. Daniel and his friends were forced to become experts in a heathen, demonic religion – Babylon was famous as the home of all sorts of sorcerers, diviners, and other occultists.

Daniel had a three-year course in the dark arts. (1:5) How would you like to be forced to become an expert in Satanism and the occult, not in the hopes of refuting it, but with the purpose of promoting it to others? Well, you're almost there right now. I didn't need to know all about transgenderism, and all the various ways people can hate each other.

This sequence of events was initiated by God... Daniel 1:2 – the Lord delivered Jehoiakim ☞ into Nebuchadnezzar's hands... **Sometimes the short-term success of the wicked is in God's plan.**



In verse 17 we see that while they were being educated and trained in this new culture, it was ☞ actually God who gave them understanding of literature and learning. **Even in Babylon God is in control.**

Daniel didn't have the freedom that we still (mostly) know here in the U.S. He had to ask permission to observe his religious practices. Everything about his faith had been stripped away, yet Daniel thrived by hope, humility and, what I call horse-sense.

We tend to do exactly the opposite of Daniel. It's easy to get discouraged and want to give up. That's not hope; that's despair or panic. It's easy to think you're better than that, or to speak arrogantly, saying you'll never go along with that kind of life; but that's not humility; that's pride. And, it can be easy to make hasty comments or argue, but sometimes that's just being stupid, when we need to be wise. **Discouragement and despair are never from God. Neither are smugness and stupidity.**

☞ **Colossians 4:5-6**

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

☞ **Thrive with Hope** - optimism = certain confidence. **Don't ever forget how it ends... Jesus and his followers win!** Daniel was in a terrible situation, but he knew that God was ultimately in control.

☞ **Don't be a Christian Eeyore** - A character in the Winnie-the-Pooh books. He is generally characterized as a pessimistic, gloomy, depressed, old gray stuffed donkey. "End of the road... nothing to do... and no hope of things getting better." I confess, sometimes I go here. I know others do too. Please pray for us. This is what I really want...

Romans 12:12

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

We thrive with Hope.

☞ **Thrive with Humility** - the quality or state of not thinking you are better than other people.

Proverbs 22:4

Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.

☞ John 13:14-15 (**Jesus set the example**)

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **15** I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Titus 3:2

...show true humility toward all men.



Daniel was always humble. He asked permission to practice his own faith. He didn't make a big show of himself. He helped Nebuchadnezzar, then King-Neb listened to him.

☞ **People respond to respect, not resentment or complaining and criticism.**

2 Timothy 2:24-26

the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. **25** Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

We thrive with Humility.

☞ **Thrive with Horse Sense** – (colloquial expression) the ability to make good judgments or decisions; common sense

When Daniel's life was threatened, he spoke with wisdom and tact (2:14ff) He didn't pull a John Wayne, Sylvester Stallone, or a Vin Diesel and retaliate. He continued to show respect to the king.

☞ **Proverbs 14:8**

The wisdom of the prudent is to **give thought to their ways,**

Our American independent attitude, as well as our pop culture inspires us to get lippy and defiant. But there are times when prudence calls for careful thought and a soft response. I'm not saying to shrink back from speaking truth, but choose your time and method carefully.

☞ **Ephesians 5:15-16**

Be very careful, then, how you **live** — **not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity,** because the days are evil.

Daniel didn't fight his captor's teaching and the belittling of his faith; he didn't rebel and get all ☞ sassy with his superiors; and because of that, **he earned the right to speak into the king's life and tell him about God.** Daniel finally had his opportunity, and he took it...

Daniel 2:26-49

The king asked Daniel (also called Belshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" **27** Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, **28** but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries..."

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. **47** The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." **48** Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on



him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. **49** Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon

☞ **The darker it gets, the more powerful your tiny light is.
We don't have to protect God, just bring fame to his name.**

Some may argue that it's time to fight. Maybe it is. In David's case, it was. The enemy was intimidating the nation with a giant, but God was setting the enemy up for defeat. It was a similar time for Gideon. God used an incredibly small minority to defeat a ruthless enemy. But in Daniel's case, the nation of Israel was already subdued, and it was the time to wait and trust God. I think perhaps we are somewhere in between. There are times to fight, but remember who the real enemy is. There are also times to wait and trust God. If that's the case, then, we should take our cues from Daniel and respond with **Hope, Humility and Horse Sense.**

And, we still need to apply the principles of revival: (2 Chronicles 7:14)

☞ **Humble yourself; Pray; Seek God's face; Turn from your wicked ways**

Perhaps God will heal our land and bring a great awakening. But even if not, we can survive and thrive in a godless culture by following Daniel's example, which, by the way, is pretty

☞ much what Jesus would do. **WWJD is still good advice in today's world.**

**The darker it gets, the more powerful your tiny light is.
We don't have to protect God, just bring fame to his name.**

This little light of mine; I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine; I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine; I'm gonna let it shine; let it shine; let it shine; let it shine

Jesus is the light; I'm gonna let him shine...