

MESSAGE NOTES

Daniel - Staying Connected to Jesus Reclaiming Presence

Daniel 1:8-16 (NIV)

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your 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."

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Babylon

Babylon first appears in Genesis 11:1-9, where humanity builds the tower of Babel to "make a name for ourselves" a collective act of self-exaltation that rejects dependence on God. That same impulse later takes historical form in the Neo-Babylonian Empire (605 BC), which conquers Jerusalem and carries Israel into exile (2 Kings 24-25). In the book of Daniel, Babylon becomes more than a geographic location; it becomes a program of cultural imperialism. Babylon renames Daniel and his friends, reeducates them in its literature and worldview, attempts to reshape their identity through the king's food (Daniel 1:1-16), and ultimately demands worship of imperial power (Daniel 3; 6). From that point forward, Babylon functions in Scripture as a symbol for any dominant cultural force that seeks to reshape allegiance, identity, and worship according to its own image rather than God's. (Adapted, John Goldingay, *Daniel*).

Digital Babylon

Author and president of the Barna Research Group, David Kinnaman describes our cultural context today as "digital Babylon," an accelerated, complex environment marked by "unlimited access, profound alienation, and a crisis of authority." In *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, Kinnaman observes that screens and digital culture don't just entertain us, they shape how we think, form our identities, and even influence

our values and loyalties. In this way, *digital Babylon* reflects the same cultural pressure that ancient Babylon exerted, only mediated through technology and the networks that now form our public imagination and daily life.

Exile

In the book of Daniel, we see what Scripture sometimes calls a *third way* of living faithfully in exile. When Daniel is taken into exile in Babylon, he appears to face two obvious choices: resist the empire outright or assimilate into it completely. But Daniel chooses neither rebellion nor compromise. He learns the language, serves in the king's court, and works for the good of the city, yet he refuses to surrender his allegiance to the God of Israel. He will not eat the king's food if it means defilement (Daniel 1:8-16). He will not stop praying to God even when it becomes illegal (Daniel 6). This is the *third way* of faithful presence fully engaged in the world yet rooted in covenant loyalty. Daniel lives in Babylon without becoming Babylonian; his loyalty to God shapes his participation in the world, embodying the kind of faithfulness God calls His people to in exile.

In the midst of exile, God speaks through Jeremiah to Israel with the call to faithful presence:

"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

— Jeremiah 29:6

Reflections/Journaling During the Lenten Season

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

February 22, 2026

Daniel 1:8-16

As needed, refer to the Order of Worship and Resources at solanabeach.church for sermon video, message outline, resources and small group questions print version.

CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

Before beginning your time in the passage this week, consider sharing your thoughts on the following question: *What does “presence” mean to you in your daily life?*

CONNECT WITH GOD (Choose the below practice or select a practice from another week.)

- **Use the “Daniel” Card for Reflection on Reclaiming Presence this Lent**

Alone: Using SBPC’s Lenten card, spend time in quiet prayer, reflection, and journaling. What has “reclaiming presence” looked like for you so far this Lent? How are you learning what it looks like to “dwell in the present moment with God?” How will you commit to “reclaiming presence” this Lent?

- **Practicing the Holy Pause (Ignatian Practice of “Statio”)**

Statio is a monastic practice of making space between activities. It is the discipline of stopping one thing before beginning another...when we do this, we become conscious of our patterns, rhythms, bodies, and emotions before moving onto the next thing. The practice allows us to be attentive to the God who is present with us.

- Spend a few minutes in this practice of “statio.” Stop whatever you were doing or thinking and practice letting it go through a series of deep breaths. As you inhale and exhale, let go of any thoughts or worry about what’s next or what just happened. Be attentive to your body’s sensations.
- When you are ready, notice what you are feeling in the pause. Allow for the present. Welcome all of it.
- Say a simple prayer of gratitude for the holy pause of this moment. Gratitude for the gift of the present. Commit to “holy pauses” throughout the next week.

CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- **Together:** Read Daniel 1 for a broader context of the passage (Daniel 1:8-16).

- **Alone:** Read Daniel 1:8-16 again. Reflect and journal, considering the below prompts:

- How might Daniel 1:8-16 help to shape your journey through Lent this year?

- Are there any distractions or habits in your life right now that pull you away from being fully present with God, yourself, or others?
- What fears or doubts arise when you try to “reclaim presence,” and how can you invite God into those moments?

- **Together** in smaller groups: Share your reflections from the prompts.

CONNECT WITH SCRIPTURE

If needed, read the passage again. Then select the best questions or customize the questions for your group.

- Watch the Bible project Video(s) on the book of Daniel. bibleproject.com/videos/daniel/
- Review the sermon outline.
- What are you still reflecting on from the message this week?
- What do you already know about the book of Daniel or Daniel himself?
- Is there anything new or surprising to you about the book of Daniel?
- What is the historical and cultural context of Daniel and his friends in Babylon?
- What stands out to you about Daniel’s choice in verse 8?
- What is the third way of living in exile (see message notes)?
- How do you wrestle with living faithfully in a world that often pulls attention away from the way of Christ?
- What are some habits or influences that may pull us away from being present to God or ourselves?
- What do you think about the idea that we live in a “digital Babylon” today?
- How might a “digital fast” connect to Daniel 1 or the sermon series?

ENGAGE AND EXPLORE

Together: explore the Jeremiah verse below, and reflect on how it connects to our Daniel passage this week. You may also consider how Jeremiah 29:6 connects to Community Serve Day next week.

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

— Jeremiah 29:6

PRAYER

Together in small groups: Share prayer requests with one another. Explore ways you can pray for one another through Lent as you seek to “reclaim presence.” Pray for Community Serve Day on March 1st.