Lessons From A Captive

Renew your habits, keep honoring God, and get tough

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, June 21, 2020
PASSAGES	Daniel 6:10; Daniel 6; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Daniel 1:4; Daniel 5:25-28; Ephesians 5:21; Romans 8:13
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Daniel faced a "new normal" again and again: carried off as a young man, serving under three regimes, his city and temple destroyed. When the law against prayer was signed, he knelt by his window toward Jerusalem "as he had done previously." He adapted his habits without abandoning them, kept honoring a God who rules the whole world, and grew resilient. We can come out of our own hard season better, not worse.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The old normal may never return. The question is how to walk into the new one.
- Daniel could not pray at the temple, so he prayed toward it. Altered habits please God; abandoned habits do not serve us.
- Daniel likely lost his family, his city and his way of life, and still counted God worthy of praise.
- Our outer self is wasting away, but our inner self is being renewed day by day. This is "light momentary affliction" preparing an eternal weight of glory.
- God is not a regional deity, and he has not fallen off his throne. The times change; he does not.
- "Tough times never last, but tough people do." Resilience comes from surviving hard things, and it can be built on purpose.
- The spiritual disciplines can be a boot camp: take one at a time, study it, and practice it.

▶ 1:00:25

It was Father's Day and Hope's first Sunday back indoors, with about twenty people in the sanctuary. Geno, who learned to speak publicly in a high school classroom full of smart alecks, was glad to hear responses again instead of preaching into a dark room.

A new normal

▶ 1:02:27

That Monday the mayor had extended the stay-home order two more months, to August 15 – five months in all – and Geno admitted his heart sank. He understood the spike and the danger. But there went the summer. The lockdown had become a new normal, and the old normal might never fully return. For him, he said, the new normal was in many ways "debilitating and discouraging." So he looked to Scripture for people who faced a new normal of their own.

Daniel in his third regime

▶ 1:04:05

Children's books picture a young Daniel in the lions' den, but by Daniel 6 he was around eighty. Taken captive as a young man under Nebuchadnezzar, he had served through Belshazzar's reign, read the writing on the wall – "you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting" (Daniel 5:25–28) – and seen Darius the Mede take the city that night. Now a third regime was coming in, and Daniel's excellent spirit lifted him to one of the top three posts over 120 satraps.

▶ 1:06:16

Geno put it in Texas terms: a new coach comes in with his assistants, the old staff start sending out résumés, and then the new coach decides to keep one of them. The others were not pleased. Knowing Daniel prayed three times a day toward Jerusalem, they persuaded a rather naive king to ban prayer to anyone but him for thirty days. They watched Daniel at his open window and reported him. Since the king's law could not be rescinded, Daniel was thrown into the pit, and the king, who liked him, could not sleep.

▶ 1:08:41

At dawn Daniel was alive. It turned out that his enemies had not so much set a trap for Daniel as God had set one for them: the king threw them into the same pit, and the lions – no toothless old cats – overpowered them before they reached the bottom (Daniel 6). Daniel rose to prominence, his opponents gone.

Three lessons

▶ 1:09:52

New language, new customs, new people to lead. What did Daniel do? Geno drew three things: he renewed his habits rather than abandoning them; he never stopped intentionally honoring God, however discouraged he became; and he learned resilience – "get tough."

> "When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously."
>
> DANIEL 6:10 ↗

▶ 1:11:32

"When Daniel knew" is a pregnant phrase, Geno said. He knew it was a death sentence. Did he hide in a closet or change his routine? No – he did what he had always done. "There's immense courage in that, immense faithfulness. I want to be like that when times get tough."

1. Renew your habits

▶ 1:12:44

As a young captive Daniel was put through Babylon's schools to learn "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (Daniel 1:4), and, as was typical of the time, may well have been made a eunuch. His future was destroyed in every possible way. Yet he excelled and rose "like cream in milk," and some scholars think the wise men who came to the infant Jesus were shaped by his legacy.

▶ 1:14:24

In Jerusalem, probably from the priestly or leading class, he would have gone to the temple to pray, because that was where God's presence was. In Babylon he could not, so he knelt toward Jerusalem – not because a rule required it, but because he was still seeking the presence of God. Was that altered habit pleasing to God? The room said yes.

▶ 1:16:28

Geno confessed his own version. He normally rises early to pray and walk, but in the pandemic – partly discouragement, partly laziness – his sleep had drifted, and now he often walks in the heat of the day. But he walks. "Is it as good as it was? No. But Daniel, I believe, was rewarded for renewing his

habits, not abandoning them." We cannot abandon the habits that keep us emotionally and spiritually healthy, even when the season pushes us that way. We alter them.

2. Keep honoring God

▶ 1:18:10

Daniel's faith held through three administrations, the destruction of Jerusalem, and very likely the slaughter of his entire family. His town was burned, the temple destroyed, his way of life obliterated, and he still considered God worthy of praise. What we struggle with, Geno suggested, is the reality of the unseen. What we can see tends to convince us it is the only thing that is real.

▶ 1:20:05

> "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16–17 ↗

"That's a verse for us today." Anyone over fifty, Geno said, knows the outer self is wasting away – stay up until midnight and it takes him three days to recover, and many live with chronic illness. But the inner self is renewed day by day, which implies something done every day. He had the room repeat "this light momentary affliction" three times. Life's suffering is light and momentary next to the glory being prepared.

▶ 1:23:09

> "As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:18 ↗

▶ 1:23:55

Daniel learned that lesson. The reigning view was that gods were regional: Babylon had destroyed the Jews' temple, so Babylon's gods were stronger. Daniel came to see that the God of the temple ruled beyond it – the God of creation and of all peoples, including the Babylonians who had ruined his life. "God is still God in the new normal. He hasn't fallen off his throne. He hasn't become feeble. He's not affected by the virus." We are the ones who falter.

▶ 1:26:12

"The times they are a-changin'," Geno quoted Bob Dylan – a Nobel laureate, so he felt free to – but our hope lies in an unchanging God. Then he gathered up who that God is: the great God of creation, the hope of all nations, the author of our salvation, the bedrock of the church, the bridegroom of his bride, our soon-coming King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. "He can be trusted in the new normal."

3. Get tough

▶ 1:27:31

Or, as he had realized while preaching outdoors earlier, resilience: the ability to bounce back. He loves the title of a Robert Schuller book he has never read: *Tough Times Never Last, but Tough People Do*. The coronavirus will land in the dustbin of history. The question is whether we come out of it better or debilitated. "Now is the time to toughen up, to quit worrying so much, start encouraging others."

▶ 1:29:16

How? One way is simply surviving hard things – a chronic illness, a car wreck, a lost job, a death – and finding on the other side a new confidence that you came through. That is haphazard, though. The intentional way is boot camp. From his two brothers' military stories, Geno described being told when to eat, sleep, rise, exercise and memorize. It is not kind, but it teaches discipline and toughness on purpose.

Spiritual boot camp

▶ 1:31:35

Someone outdoors had shouted, "Geno, take us to boot camp," and he told them to do it at home. The spiritual version is leaning into the disciplines – habits that tend toward spiritual health. His favorite book on them is Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, with chapters on twelve: meditation, prayer, fasting and study; simplicity, solitude, submission and service; confession, worship, guidance and celebration. Read one chapter, meditate on it, practice what Foster suggests. One a week is a twelve-week boot camp; one a month, a year.

▶ 1:33:47

Take submission. "Isn't that just for wives?" – which drew laughter and some booing. No: Paul tells all believers to submit "one to another" (Ephesians 5:21). One way is an accountability group of three, where you ask the others to tell you your blind spots, kindly, and agree to act on what they say. Spouses can do it for each other, or adult children with parents. It is frightening, Geno admitted, for him too.

▶ 1:35:23

Why? Because we are all meant to be submitted to the Master. Submitting to Jesus is easy if you are not spiritually attuned – you just do what you want. Those attuned to the Spirit find it harder, because they keep hearing what he wants to change. The Spirit is given to lead us in putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13) – "mortify," in the King James. So let's come out of this season better Christians and better people. The idea that hard times must take us down a few notches? "Blarney."

▶ 1:37:02

He closed with an exercise for the room and for families at home: tell someone which of the twelve disciplines you want to grow in – study, perhaps, or silence – and pray for each other. He prayed for the Spirit's help to take one or two steps, and thanked God for the worship and for "richly spiritual help."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Daniel 5:25–28
- Daniel 6:1–24
- Daniel 6:10
- Daniel 1:4
- 2 Corinthians 4:16–17
- 2 Corinthians 4:18
- Ephesians 5:21 (KJV)
- Romans 8:13

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What part of your life feels like a “new normal” right now, and how has it affected you spiritually?
2. Daniel prayed toward the temple when he could not pray in it. Which of your spiritual habits needs to be adapted rather than abandoned?
3. What makes the unseen hard for you to treat as real, and how does 2 Corinthians 4 help?
4. When have you come through something hard and found a new confidence on the other side?
5. Of Foster’s twelve disciplines, which one will you start your own boot camp with this week, and who will you tell?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor. He learned to speak in public as a high school teacher, has two brothers who served in the military, and counts Richard Foster’s Celebration of Discipline as his favorite book on the spiritual disciplines, which he has taught as a course. He preached this on the day Hope reopened its sanctuary to a small, masked congregation.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH4eYeVJoWE&t=0s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.