

**Hi, everybody. Thanks so much for tuning in. And I sure look forward to being together again. Hey, but until then, thanks for joining us from the comfort of wherever you are joining us from. And for those of you who have allowed us to be your church while your local church is gearing up to reopen, we have certainly enjoyed having you and we will be here as long as you need us. Today, we begin a brand new four-part series entitled "Leading Through", and the subtitle is "Three Essentials for Navigating Uncertainty". "Three Essentials for Navigating Uncertainty".**

Now here's the thing. Here's what we all have in common. In light of everything that's happened the past several months, there's a sense in which we are all picking up the pieces, moving forward the best that we can, but many of us, and I bet this includes you, many of us are responsible for helping other people move forward as well. Family members, maybe employees, team members, students, members of the community. So if you're a parent, a manager, a business owner, an executive, a teacher, a coach, a mayor, maybe part of a city council, people are looking to you and they're looking to me for direction. They're looking to us for inspiration. And mainly they're looking to us for hope. And you know this because you're a leader.

Leading under normal circumstances and leading in normal conditions is tough enough, right? But leading people through and out of what we've just come through? Not for the faint of heart. And, and I won't tell if you won't, but the people who are looking to us for leadership, they have no idea how unprepared we are and how unprepared we feel, right? Because come on, we don't have all the answers. We don't have all the answers. We don't always know what to do. And isn't it true? We're just kind of making this up as we go along. At least I know I am.

Now this is super important. About 20 years before the story we're gonna look at today, about 20 years before that, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah. The city of Jerusalem was actually spared for the time being. But while he was there, Nebuchadnezzar went in and rounded up members of the nation's elite, their citizens, their best and their brightest people, and brought them active Babylon as hostages. And included in this number of folks were Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel. Then, a few years later, Nebuchadnezzar returns to Jerusalem. He sacks the city. He destroys the temple. But before he destroyed it, he looted it. And then he takes all the contents of the Jewish temple to Babylon, and he places them in the palace vault.

**Now I need you to log all of that away because those details become very important toward the end of today's story. Now, Daniel and the Judeans exiled in Babylon, for them, the moral of this story was simple. That God was judging the nation of Israel for its disobedience, and that basically God was putting the nation in timeout until they got their act together, until they decided to become faithful to the covenant. So for them, that's how they understood these events. But King Nebuchadnezzar didn't see it that way. The way he saw it, it was very simple. His God, Marduk, was clearly more powerful than the Jewish god, Yahweh. And Israel's god had lost. So consequently, that's just the end of the story, right? But as it turns out, that was not the end of the story. In fact, it's actually why we know this story.**

Daniel documents these unusual events in the Old Testament Book of Daniel. He'd been in Babylon for about 20 years by this time. He'd become a trusted advisor to King Nebuchadnezzar. And according to Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing, terrifying dream that he was absolutely sure had some kind of significance for him and possibly for Babylon. And so Daniel documents what Nebuchadnezzar describes as this horrible dream. Here's what he writes. He said, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous, and I had a dream that made me afraid".

And here's what he dreamed. He dreamed that there was this enormous, beautiful tree that was visible to all the earth, and all the animals of the earth rested under the canopy of this enormous tree, and it provided food for all the earth's creatures. Then, in the dream he hears this loud voice from heaven that says, "Cut it down". And in his dream, suddenly this enormous tree is cut down to a stump. And then in the dream, the voice says this. It says, "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. And let his mind be changed from that of a man, and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven

times pass by for him".

And then the voice announces this. "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that". And here's the bottom line for Nebuchadnezzar and here's the bottom line for us. That all the world would know that "the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people". So when Nebuchadnezzar wakes up from this dream, he is terrified, and he knows it has something to do with him. So he calls in all the usual suspects to help him interpret this dream, and they either can't or perhaps they won't, and eventually he brings in Daniel. And when Daniel hears Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he also is terrified. In fact, Daniel is so terrified when he hears Nebuchadnezzar's dream, that Nebuchadnezzar actually has to comfort Daniel.

And here's what Daniel says. He says, "My Lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries". But it doesn't, it's all about you. And then I think, perhaps, because of what he was about to say, Daniel takes a step back and he says, "King Nebuchadnezzar, here's what the dream means. The Most High God has decreed that you will be driven away from humanity. That you're about to become like a wild animal. That you're going to humiliate yourself publicly. And that this will go on until you finally acknowledge", and then maybe he takes another step back, "until you finally acknowledge that the Most High God, not you and not Marduk, is sovereign over the kingdoms of men".

**And then he gives him a little bit of good news. He says this, he says, "Your kingdom will eventually be restored to you, but not until you acknowledge that heaven rules. Therefore, your majesty, be pleased to accept my advice". And then Daniel steps into his role as an advisor to the most powerful man on the planet, and here's what he says. He says, "Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue".**

Well, Nebuchadnezzar was terrified by the dream, but apparently he wasn't all that terrified, because nothing changed for 12 months. And then everything changed. 12 months later, King Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and he said to himself or he said out loud, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty"? And we can hear the music change, can't we? And we can pretty much guess what happens next, can't we? "The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven". And the voice said this. "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar".

Now King Nebuchadnezzar is the one who's accustomed to making the decrees. Now someone is making a decree about him. "King Nebuchadnezzar, your royal authority has been taken from you". It's been taken because it can be taken, and it can be taken because it was given. It was on loan. It was a stewardship, Nebuchadnezzar. And Nebuchadnezzar, you didn't know it. But you are accountable and you're being called to account. You made it all about you, and now you're through. "King Nebuchadnezzar, you will be driven away from people and you will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the ox. And seven times, seven times will pass by for you, until you acknowledge". And here's the bottom line. "Until you finally acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign, the Most High is sovereign over all the kingdoms on earth, and he gives them to anyone he wishes".

And immediately Daniel says, immediately, "Nebuchadnezzar was driven away from people and he ate grass like the ox. His body was eventually drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird". Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind, possibly stricken with boanthropy. Boanthropy is actually a real psychological disorder where the person is suffering from it actually believes that he or she is a cow or an ox.

So what happens is his attendants or his wife walks in one day and they find King Nebuchadnezzar crawling around on all fours making animal noises. They take him out to a private garden and they try to keep this story private, and he lives there. We don't know how long, but eventually he comes back to his senses. And when he's told what happened, of course, he's absolutely humiliated. And he puts two and two together. He

remembers the dream and he remembers Daniel's interpretation of the dream. And Daniel takes down his confession, and here's what Nebuchadnezzar said at the end of that time. He said, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was finally restored". And then, then of course he did. "Then I praised the Most High. I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion".

**Suddenly it's not all about Marduk, it's all about Daniel's God. "His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation". This is so powerful. "No one, no one can hold back his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?' And now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride... Those who walk in pride, he is able to humble".**

So here's the lesson for Nebuchadnezzar and for us. Leadership, even kingship, is a stewardship. It's a gift, it's temporary. Leaders and kings, leaders and kings are accountable. And so we dare not, this is our lesson, we dare not leverage our power, we dare not leverage our influence to oppress. Now this whole incident with Nebuchadnezzar did not happen in secret. Wherever there were slaves, there were no secrets. And this story eventually circulates throughout the royal family and beyond. Then, follow along, 40 years go by, 40 years later, by this time Nebuchadnezzar dies, there were two or three other kings that lasted for a very short time, but 40 years later, the new king of Babylon is Nabonidus. He's the brand new king of Babylon. He's the king of Babylon, but he is no King Nebuchadnezzar.

And as the glory of Babylon begins to fade, in the East, the Persians, under the leadership of Cyrus the Great, begin to flex their military and economic muscle, and Cyrus the Great sets his sights on the city of Babylon with all of its legendary wealth, and he launches a campaign of conquest and destruction with Babylon, the city of Babylon, as the ultimate prize. So King Nabonidus, who's the king now in Babylon, he put his co-regent, Belshazzar, in charge of the city. I know it's a lot of names. He puts Belshazzar in charge of the city of Babylon. Then he and the Babylonian army go out to confront Cyrus who's making his way toward the city of Babylon.

Well, the Persian army under Cyrus decimates the Babylonian army. They capture Nabonidus and they march on the city. And Cyrus knows, Cyrus knows that the great city of Babylon, the defenses make it pretty much impregnable, but he's gonna march on the city anyway. Meanwhile, inside the city of Babylon, Belshazzar, who now considers himself the king, prepares the city for a protracted siege. He reinforces the gates as the Persian army surrounds the city. And he is so confident the Persians will never breach the walls of Babylon. I mean, from his perspective, the Persian army is gonna thirst to death, starve to death, or if they stay too long, they're gonna freeze to death. But there was no way they would take the city of Babylon. So with the city's defenses set, Belshazzar decides to throw a party. A huge party.

**Now, in light of what happens next, it's important to note that Belshazzar was actually the late King Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. In the text, it refers to him as Nebuchadnezzar's son, but that's just the way they talked. He was actually King Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. So here's what happened next. "King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for 1,000 of his nobles". This was a big party. "And he drank wine with them. And while Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father", or his grandfather, "had taken from the temple of Jerusalem". We talked about that up top, remember.**

"So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them". They essentially made a mockery of these sacred things that had been taken from God's temple in Jerusalem. But it gets worse. "As they drank, as they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold, the gods of silver, of bronze, iron, the gods of wood and the gods of stone". And Yahweh had finally had enough. The text says that suddenly, "Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand, in the royal palace". And the party stopped, right? The king watched. "The king watched the hand as it wrote", but he can't read what's being

written. In fact, nobody can read it.

The text says that "his face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking". And then Belshazzar announces to everybody at the party, "Anyone who can read this, anyone who can read and interpret this writing, I will make them the third highest ruler in the kingdom". But nobody steps up. Now his queen, who apparently either wasn't invited to the party or who left early, hears all of this commotion, or maybe she hears a lack of commotion, she steps into the banquet hall, she glances up at the wall and sees this strange writing on the wall, and she comes over to the king and she says, "Pumpkin", or however she referred to Belshazzar.

"Pumpkin", she says. "Don't be alarmed. Don't look so pale. There's actually a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. King Nebuchadnezzar actually appointed him to be the chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners a long time ago. And this man has in him the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and to solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means".

Now, Daniel must've been in his 70s by this time. Apparently he'd been forgotten by everybody, except perhaps the queen. So they find Daniel, they usher him in. Belshazzar repeats his promises of wealth and glory and power. Daniel shakes his head. He glances up at the strange script that's written on the plaster and he says, "You may keep your gifts. You may keep gifts for yourself, Belshazzar, and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and I will tell him what it means".

**And I'm sure you could have heard a pin drop in the throne room as Daniel begins. And he says this, "Your majesty, your majesty". He recounts a little history, puts this in context. "Your majesty, the Most High God", and here's our word, "gave your father or your grandfather Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor". It was a gift. Because, he says, "Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and all the peoples of every language dreaded and feared your grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. But when his heart, but when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory". Until, until, until. "Until he acknowledged". And here's the bottom line. "Until he finally acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and he sets over them any one he wishes".**

Then I think he paused, and he looks at Belshazzar right in the eye and he says this. "But you, but you, but you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all of this". You've heard this story before. You knew what happened to your grandfather. You've been warned, you should know better. "But instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven".

And then I think Daniel got a little bit angry, because as he looked around the throne room and he saw these precious articles that had been stolen from the Jewish temple being used the way they were, and he shakes his finger in the face of the king and he said, "You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles and your wives and your concubines drank wine from them". You have made a mockery of Yahweh. And then, to make it worse, "You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand".

He just offends their entire pantheon of gods. "But you did not honor, you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription". To which he could have added, and are you really sure you wanna know what it says? "Here is what the words mean. Mene, God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end". Belshazzar, your leadership was a loan, and God is calling the loan. "Tekel, you have been weighed on the scales and you have been found wanting". You are accountable, you've been evaluated. "Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians". It's been taken away. You thought it was yours. It was never yours. He gives and he takes away, and now he's taking it away.

**Now, while all of this is going on, while they're having the party, you know, while Daniel's interpreting what's been written on the plaster, unbeknownst to anyone in the room, Persian engineers were actually diverting a portion of the Euphrates River into a swamp outside the city. Now the Euphrates River actually ran under the wall of Babylon and through the city, that's why they had an endless water supply and that's why they were not afraid of a protracted siege. But here's the thing. By diverting the water supply, the Persian engineers caused the level of the Euphrates River to drop. And when it was low enough, a Persian SEAL team swam under the wall, killed the Babylonian guards guarding the gates, and then dragged those enormous steel-girded doors open, and the Persians took the city.**

In fact, Daniel tells us that that very night, "That very night, Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain. The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth, and he gives them to anyone he wishes". Now, I'll be honest. I'm not sure how all that works. But if it's true, and I think it is, there's something there for all of us who have any measure of influence. Your talent, your education, your family connections, your hard work, your discipline, or maybe just your plain luck, you know, puts you in a place of influence. But what you do with that influence determines whether or not you are a leader worth following, a leader worth emulating. And this is what's so catalytic about this idea.

Unlike Nebuchadnezzar in his early years and unlike Belshazzar, when we view our influence, when we view our influence, however great or small, when we view it as a temporary stewardship for which we are accountable, we will be far less likely to spend it all, focus it all, or leverage it all on ourself. And we will be far more inclined to leverage our leadership and our influence for the sake of those we have the privilege to lead. We won't need to be reminded that greatness is more than progress.

When we embrace this definition of leadership that incorporates the idea that it's a stewardship, that it's temporary and that we're accountable, we won't have to be reminded that people matter, that people matter most, that what's best for people is always what's best. We won't need to be reminded that people matter to God, because we will live with the understanding that it's God who loaned us our temporary opportunity to begin with.

**So, whether you're leading a family, a business, a nonprofit, a division, a department, a team, a city, a state, or a nation, remember this. Leadership, leadership at every level, leadership is always a stewardship. It is always temporary. And you are accountable. And here's why. Because the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and he gives them temporarily to anyone he wishes. Now all of that is simply the setup or the context for where we're going over the next three weeks. And next time we're gonna tackle the first of these three essentials for leading through times of disruption and uncertainty, so please, please, please, don't miss part two of "Leading Through".**