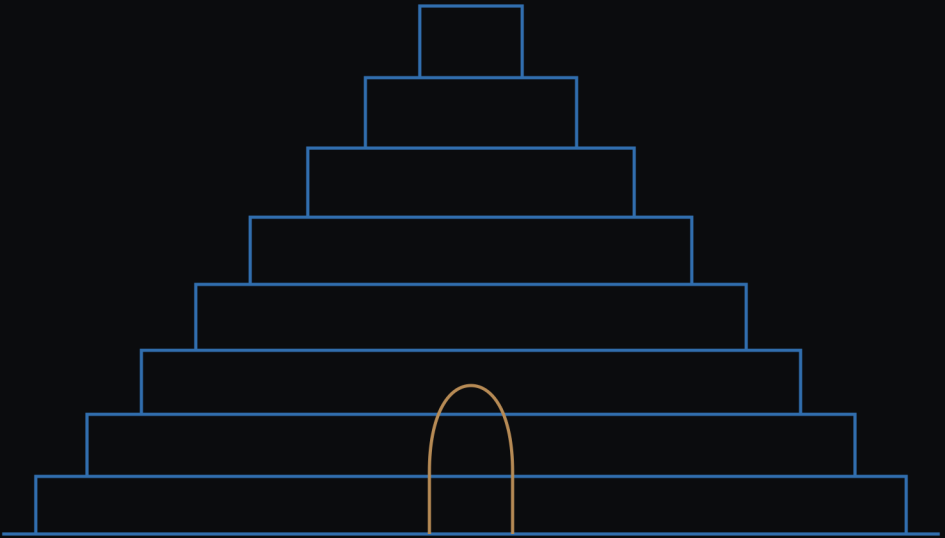


BUILT FOR BABYLON

*Standing Without Bowing
in a Culture of Compromise*



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BUILT FOR BABYLON

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INTRODUCTION

Built for This Moment



You didn't choose the century into which you were born. You didn't select the cultural moment that would surround your life. You didn't sit in heaven with a map and decide which city, state, family, or generation would become the setting of your assignment.

But God did.

That means your location isn't an accident, and your moment isn't a mistake. God knew the pressure this generation would face. He knew the confusion that would fill our culture, the speed at which ideas would travel, the institutions that would shift, and the courage that faithfulness would require. Yet He still placed you here.

You were not born too late for the good days. You were not born too early for the breakthrough. You are alive right now because God intends to reveal His kingdom through your life right now.

God doesn't only call people. God plants people in places.

The question is not whether our culture is changing. It is. The question is not whether pressure is increasing. It is. The real question is whether the people of God will recognize the moment and remember who they are.

Many Christians can feel the tension. We love people whose beliefs we can't affirm. We work inside systems that don't share our convictions. We raise children in a world that wants to disciple them before they can recognize what discipleship is. We carry the truth of Scripture into a culture that increasingly believes truth should be personally constructed rather than humbly received.¹

Some believers respond by withdrawing. They isolate themselves, stay angry, and spend more time describing the darkness than carrying the light. Other believers assimilate. They quietly adjust their convictions until there is no meaningful difference between the Church and the culture it was sent to reach.

Jesus gives us another way.

On the night before the cross, Jesus prayed for His disciples. He knew the hostility they would face and the pressure every later generation of believers would experience. Yet He did not ask the Father to remove them from the world. He prayed that they would be protected from the evil one, sanctified by the truth, and sent into the world just as He had been sent (John 17:15-18).

Jesus didn't pray for evacuation. He prayed for consecration and mission.

That prayer creates the tension every disciple must learn to carry:

How do we live in a culture we can't agree with, among people we're commanded to love, without becoming what we've been called to reach?

The book of Daniel answers that question. Daniel and his friends were not living in a culture that merely misunderstood them. They were taken into captivity by an empire that destroyed Jerusalem, removed them from their homes, renamed them, retrained them, pressured them to compromise, and eventually demanded their worship.²

They lived in Babylon.

Yet Babylon never fully lived in them.

They learned its language without surrendering their minds. They served its leaders without worshiping its gods. They contributed to its flourishing without confusing its kingdom with God's kingdom. They demonstrated that it is possible to live with conviction without becoming cruel, to show courage without becoming combative, and to seek a city's good without surrendering to the spirit controlling it.

This book is not a call to fear the world. It is a call to understand it. It is not permission to despise people. It is an invitation to fight for them. It is not a political manifesto. It is a biblical summons to allegiance, holiness, courage, love, and Spirit-empowered mission.

Babylon is real. Its pressure is real. But the people of God are not powerless.

Jesus is still Lord. The gospel is still the power of God for salvation. The Holy Spirit is still being poured out. Truth has not changed. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church Jesus is building.

You were not placed here to retreat.

You were built for Babylon.

PART ONE

Understanding Babylon



Before we can live faithfully in Babylon, we have to understand what Babylon represents. Scripture presents Babylon as a real empire, but it also traces a spiritual pattern that begins before Daniel and reaches far beyond him. Babylon is what humanity builds when it wants the blessings of order, identity, prosperity, and power without submission to God.

CHAPTER ONE

God Plants People in Places



There are moments when you look back and realize God was preparing a place before you ever understood its significance.

When Discovery Church began, we met in a small warehouse. We had folding metal chairs, a struggling projector, and no air conditioning. We could squeeze around 120 people into that room if everybody liked each other and nobody needed personal space. We thanked God for it because that room carried early prayers, first invitations, salvations, restored families, and courageous steps of faith.

But we also knew that room wasn't the destination.

Faith keeps making room for people who aren't here yet.

Years later, after acquiring the property where Discovery now ministers, we learned that the land had once been owned by Billy Graham. I don't believe land saves people. Jesus saves people. I don't believe a former owner leaves behind some magical anointing that can be inherited through a deed.

But I do believe in the providence of God.

Long before that property was on our radar, it was already known to God. A piece of land once connected to one of the

greatest evangelistic ministries in modern history would eventually become a place where thousands of people would hear the gospel and respond to Jesus. We couldn't have arranged that story. God was working before we were aware of what He was doing.

**Before your assignment is visible to you, it is
already known to God.**

Scripture repeatedly shows God connecting people with places. Abraham was called to leave one land and go to another. Jacob encountered God at Bethel and realized that the place he had treated as ordinary was marked by divine activity. Moses met God at a burning bush and was told that the ground beneath him was holy. Israel was planted in the promised land with the responsibility to reflect the character and rule of God. Esther was positioned within Persia for a moment of national crisis. Paul received a vision calling him toward Macedonia. The early Church was sent outward from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

This does not mean every location is automatically holy or that geography controls God. It means God assigns people to real places. He works through cities, homes, churches, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and nations. He cares about where people live because He cares about the people who live there.

The Bible also reveals that places can become spiritually contested. In Daniel 10, an angel tells Daniel that his response was delayed by conflict with the “prince of the Persian kingdom.” The passage pulls back the curtain for a moment. Visible empires and invisible powers were operating at the same time. Paul later teaches that our struggle is not ultimately against flesh and blood, but against spiritual rulers, authorities, and forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12).³

This truth should make us discerning, but it should also keep us from becoming hateful.

Your neighbor isn't your enemy. The student repeating what the culture taught them isn't your enemy. The coworker trapped in confusion isn't your enemy. The politician isn't your ultimate enemy. The person living in sin isn't your enemy.

We don't fight people. We fight for people.

We confront lies because lies hold people in bondage. We speak truth because truth sets people free. We resist spiritual darkness while carrying the love of Jesus to the people living under its influence.

Your Location Is Part of Your Assignment

It is easy to romanticize faithfulness somewhere else. If you live in a difficult state, you imagine serving God in an easier one. If your workplace is resistant to faith, you dream about working around believers. If your family is complicated, you wonder what your life would be like if you had been planted in a different family.

Sometimes God does redirect us. Abraham was told to go. Joseph was carried into Egypt. Paul was repeatedly sent to new cities. We should remain open to God's leading.

But we must not confuse discomfort with divine redirection. Sometimes the pressure you want to escape is connected to the assignment you are meant to embrace.

Jesus prayed, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world" (John 17:15 NIV). He knew the world would resist the truth His disciples carried, but His answer was not removal. His answer was protection, sanctification, and sending.

The answer to Babylon isn't moving to Tennessee, Texas, or Idaho. God loves those places too, but changing your zip code can't remove the spiritual battle. Babylon is not limited to one political climate or one part of the country. Wherever human beings attempt to live without submission to God, the spirit of Babylon will be at work.

The answer is not evacuation. The answer is consecration and mission.

God can plant a Spirit-filled teacher in a public school. He can plant a courageous student on a university campus. He can plant a business owner in an industry that has forgotten integrity. He can plant a compassionate nurse in a hospital where people feel like numbers. He can plant a disciple in government, entertainment, construction, technology, law enforcement, social work, or the arts.

The presence of darkness does not cancel your assignment. It clarifies why your light is needed.

Faithfulness in Time and Geography

We often think about calling in terms of what we are supposed to do. Scripture also invites us to consider when and where we are supposed to do it.

Esther was told that she may have come to her royal position “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). Her position, her geography, and her historical moment converged into an assignment. She did not choose the crisis, but she did choose courage within it.

You may not have chosen this cultural moment, but you can choose faithfulness within it.

God knew your personality, gifts, story, weaknesses, and spiritual formation. He knew the pressure of this generation. He still chose to place you here. That does not mean you are sufficient in yourself. It means His grace is sufficient for the assignment He has given you.

Stop treating your location as merely the place you are trying to leave. Ask God what He wants to do through you while you are there.

Your home is a place of assignment. Your children are not distractions from your calling. Discipling them is part of it. Your workplace is not only the place that funds your real ministry. It

may be one of the primary mission fields God has entrusted to you. Your city is not merely a collection of problems. It is filled with people Jesus died to save.

Where God plants you, He intends to reveal His kingdom through you.

Reflection

1. Where has God planted you in this season?
2. Have you been treating that place as an assignment or merely as something to endure?
3. Who are the people around you that God may be calling you to fight for rather than fight against?

Prayer

Father, help me recognize the purpose within the place You have planted me. Protect me from fear, anger, and spiritual passivity. Teach me to see people through the eyes of Jesus. Sanctify me by Your truth and send me into my world with courage, humility, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CHAPTER TWO

The Spirit of Babylon



Babylon is more than a point on an ancient map.

It was a real city and a powerful empire. Babylon conquered Judah, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and carried God's people into exile. We should never erase that historical reality. Daniel's courage was not formed in an imaginary conflict. He served God inside an actual government with real power to reward compliance and punish resistance.

Yet the Bible also uses Babylon to reveal something larger than one empire. Babylon becomes a picture of organized human rebellion, a system that rejects God's authority while attempting to create security, identity, morality, prosperity, and unity on human terms.

Babylon is a city, an empire, a system, and ultimately a symbol.

To understand its spirit, we have to return to Babel.

The City Humanity Builds Without God

Genesis 11 describes humanity gathering on the plains of Shinar. The people decide to build a city and a tower reaching toward the heavens. They say, "Let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4 NIV).

The problem was not architecture. God is not threatened by tall buildings. The issue was allegiance. Their project expressed a collective determination to build identity, security, unity, and greatness without dependence upon God.

They wanted transcendence without worship, community without covenant, progress without obedience, and a name without receiving one from God.

That is the spirit of Babylon.

**Babylon is what humanity builds when it wants
God's benefits without God's authority.**

The tower eventually fell, but the impulse remained. Empires change. Rulers change. Technologies change. The human desire to define good and evil apart from the Creator continues.

Babylon says:

We will define truth.

We will determine morality.

We will construct identity.

We will build our own kingdom.

We will make our own name.

We will live without submission to God.

That same spirit reaches its political and cultural height in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar does not merely conquer territory. He takes talented young people, removes them from their covenant environment, immerses them in Babylon's language and literature, gives them new names, feeds them from his table, brings them into his service, and demands public worship of the image he has created.

Babylon does not only want land. Babylon wants formation.

From Genesis to Revelation

The Bible's Babylon storyline stretches from Genesis to Revelation.

In Genesis, Babel is humanity organizing itself in proud independence from God. In Daniel, Babylon is an empire that attempts to absorb God's people into its system. In Revelation, Babylon appears as a corrupt world order marked by spiritual adultery, economic seduction, political power, violence, luxury, and opposition to the people of God.⁴

Revelation does not invite believers to obsess over identifying one modern city, political party, or nation as Babylon. Its warning is deeper. Every nation, institution, market, movement, or culture can participate in Babylon when it exalts human power, profits from corruption, persecutes faithfulness, celebrates what God calls evil, and promises life apart from the Lamb.

Babylon can appear on the political left or the political right. It can wear the language of liberation or tradition. It can enter corporate boardrooms, university classrooms, entertainment studios, government offices, digital platforms, and churches. It is present anywhere human allegiance is redirected away from God and toward power, pleasure, wealth, ideology, nation, self, or success.

That is why believers must be careful. If we reduce Babylon to "those people," we may fail to recognize where its spirit has influenced us.

Babylon is not only out there. Its values can attempt to enter our hearts.

Spiritual Babylon in Our Culture

Our culture increasingly treats personal autonomy as sacred. The highest good is often described as the freedom to define yourself, express yourself, and remove any authority that challenges the self you have chosen to become.¹

Scripture begins somewhere different. We are created, not self-created. We receive life, bodies, purpose, truth, and moral boundaries from a loving God. Freedom is not the absence of all limits. Biblical freedom is the power to become who God created us to be.

Babylon says, “Look within yourself and create your truth.”

Jesus says, “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me.”

Babylon says, “Your desires reveal your identity.”

Jesus says our desires must be brought under His lordship and transformed by His grace.

Babylon says, “No authority stands above the authentic self.”

The gospel says Jesus is Lord.

This conflict reaches into nearly every area of modern life. We see it when feelings become final authority, when the body is treated as raw material for the will, when disagreement is interpreted as hatred, when sexual desire becomes identity, when politics promises salvation, when success becomes righteousness, and when technology trains us to believe that anything possible must also be good.

We see it in the attention economy. Digital platforms profit by keeping people anxious, outraged, envious, stimulated, and divided. We are told we are freely expressing ourselves while algorithms quietly decide what we repeatedly see. We believe we are using our devices while our devices are training our appetites, shortening our attention, and shaping what feels normal.⁵

We see it in consumer culture. People are not treated primarily as souls to love, but as appetites to study and customers to capture. Desire must constantly be stirred because contentment is bad for business. Babylon trains us to measure life by what we possess, display, experience, and achieve.⁵

We see it in politics when parties demand the kind of unquestioning allegiance that belongs to God alone. Christians

can become so invested in defeating the other side that they excuse dishonesty, cruelty, pride, and corruption on their own. A political movement may be important, but it cannot bear the weight of worship. No candidate died for your sins. No party will establish the kingdom of God.⁵

We even see Babylon's spirit in religious spaces when platforms matter more than people, charisma matters more than character, influence matters more than integrity, and leaders build their own names while using the name of Jesus.

The spirit of Babylon is not exposed merely by pointing at secular culture. It is exposed whenever we ask, "Where have we attempted to build without submission to God?"

Babylon Offers Counterfeit Salvation

Babylon is powerful because it does not only threaten. It offers.

It offers belonging if you accept its labels. It offers opportunity if you learn its language. It offers comfort if you loosen your convictions. It offers safety if you keep your faith private. It offers influence if you bow at the right moments.

Every counterfeit works because it resembles something real. Babylon offers versions of good things that detach the gift from the Giver.⁵

It offers identity without creation.

Justice without righteousness.

Community without covenant.

Sexuality without holiness.

Spirituality without repentance.

Prosperity without generosity.

Power without servanthood.

Truth without revelation.

The gospel offers something better. It does not flatter us by telling us we are already complete. It tells the truth about our sin and then announces the greater truth about God's grace. Jesus does not help us manufacture a new self. He makes us new. He does not invite us to find salvation through self-expression. He calls us to lose our lives in Him and discover the life we were created to live.

The Battle Behind the Battle

When Scripture speaks about spiritual powers, we should avoid two errors.³

The first is naturalism, which assumes only what we can see is real. The second is superstition, which assigns a demon to every inconvenience and removes human responsibility. The Bible gives us a more mature spiritual vision. People make real choices. Institutions develop real patterns. Ideas produce real consequences. At the same time, spiritual forces exploit pride, idolatry, injustice, deception, and rebellion.

Daniel 10 gives us a glimpse behind the visible world. Daniel had been praying and fasting for three weeks when an angel arrived. The angel explained that he had been resisted by the prince of Persia until Michael came to assist him. Scripture does not answer every question we might ask about that conflict, but it makes one truth clear: there was more happening than Daniel could see.

There is still more happening than we can see.

That does not give us permission to make irresponsible claims about particular people. It gives us a reason to pray, fast, discern, and put on the armor of God. It keeps us from confusing human opponents with the spiritual enemy.

**Spiritual discernment should make us more
prayerful, not more paranoid.**

Our weapons are not hatred, slander, manipulation, or violence. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb, the word of our

testimony, the truth of God, persevering faith, sacrificial love, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Babylon may control systems. Jesus still changes people.

Babylon may shape culture. Jesus is still building His Church.

Babylon may pressure allegiance. Jesus is still worthy of worship.

Reflection

1. Where do you see the spirit of Babylon offering God's gifts without God's authority?
2. Which cultural pressure most easily influences you: autonomy, approval, comfort, success, pleasure, or power?
3. Has your awareness of spiritual conflict made you prayerful and loving, or suspicious and angry?

Prayer

Jesus, You alone are Lord. Expose every place where I have accepted a counterfeit in place of Your truth. Give me discernment without fear, conviction without pride, and spiritual authority without hostility toward people. Teach me to recognize Babylon's spirit and remain completely devoted to You. Amen.

PART TWO

The Pressure of Babylon



Babylon rarely begins by demanding everything at once. It forms people progressively. First it names. Then it trains. Then it normalizes. Finally, it demands allegiance. Daniel's story exposes this strategy so we can recognize the pressure before it becomes worship.

CHAPTER THREE

Babylon Will Try to Rename You



The first battlefield is identity.

When Daniel and his friends were taken from Judah, Babylon did not merely change their address. It attempted to change the story through which they understood themselves. Their Hebrew names pointed back to the God of Israel. The chief official gave them Babylonian names connected to a different language, culture, and religious world (Daniel 1:6-7).

Daniel means “God is my judge.”

Hananiah means “The Lord is gracious.”

Mishael means “Who is like God?”

Azariah means “The Lord has helped.”

Every time their original names were spoken, they carried a confession. God is Judge. God is gracious. No one compares to God. God is our help.

Babylon gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar. Hananiah became Shadrach. Mishael became Meshach. Azariah became Abednego. The exact reconstruction of some of these Akkadian names is debated because the names come to us through Hebrew and Aramaic forms. But respected commentators agree

on the larger point: Babylon replaced names that confessed the God of Israel with names drawn from Babylon's religious world. The empire was not merely changing what these young men were called. It was trying to rewrite the confession attached to their lives.⁶

Their captors were attempting to say, "Judah is behind you. Your covenant is behind you. Your former identity is behind you. Babylon will tell you who you are now."

But a change in vocabulary did not produce a change in allegiance.

Babylon could change what the court called them, but it could not change who God created them to be.

Daniel to Belteshazzar: Who Gets the Final Verdict?

Daniel means "God is my judge." His name placed every human verdict beneath the judgment of God. Kings could evaluate him, officials could accuse him, and crowds could misunderstand him, but the Lord had the final word.

Nebuchadnezzar called him Belteshazzar, a Babylonian name Daniel himself says was connected to the name of the king's god (Daniel 4:8). Many interpreters understand the name as a plea for a Babylonian deity to protect the king or preserve a life. The precise grammatical reconstruction is discussed, but the theological relocation is clear: the name Daniel pointed to Israel's God, while Belteshazzar placed him inside Babylon's pantheon.⁶

Babylon was attempting to move Daniel's source of judgment and protection. It was saying, "Your God no longer decides your future. The king who conquered you and the gods of the empire now hold your life."

But Daniel's life told another story. Bel could not reveal Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Babylon's wise men could not interpret it. The king could issue decrees, but God revealed

mysteries. The court called him Belteshazzar, yet heaven kept proving the meaning of Daniel.

People will place verdicts over your life. Successful. Unsuccessful. Acceptable. Unacceptable. Relevant. Outdated. Dangerous. Courageous. The labels can change with the mood of the crowd. If people become your judge, their approval will become your master.

You can survive a false label when you know who holds the final verdict.

Hananiah to Shadrach: Grace Replaced by Fear

Hananiah means “The Lord is gracious.” His name announced that life rested on the undeserved favor of Yahweh.

Shadrach is less certain. One long-standing proposal connects it to Shudur-Aku, “command of Aku,” a reference to a Mesopotamian moon deity. Another Akkadian proposal carries the sense, “I am very fearful,” likely expressing reverence before a god.⁶ Either reading moves Hananiah from the grace of the Lord into the command or fear of another god.

That is what Babylon still does. Grace says you are received because of what God has done. Babylon says you are secure only while you satisfy the demands of the system. Grace produces grateful obedience. Fear produces anxious performance.

This is how people become controlled by an audience, an employer, a relationship, or an online following. They wake up asking, “What must I do today to remain accepted?” They edit their convictions to avoid rejection. They confuse the absence of criticism with the presence of peace.

Hananiah’s true name reminded him that the deepest reality over his life was not the command of Babylon but the grace of God.

When grace names you, fear doesn't get to manage you.

Mishael to Meshach: From Incomparable God to Insignificant Self

Mishael means “Who is like God?” It is a question with an obvious answer: no one. His name directed attention upward. God is incomparable, unrivaled, and worthy of worship.

Two major explanations have been offered for Meshach. One reconstructs the name as “Who is what Aku is?” replacing the God of Israel with the Babylonian moon god. Joyce Baldwin also notes the Akkadian form mesaku, meaning “I am of little account.” That second proposal is sometimes expressed more forcefully as “I am despised” or “I am contemptible.”⁷

We should be honest that scholars have not reached complete agreement. But either reading reveals a powerful reversal. “Who is like God?” becomes either “Who is like Aku?” or “I am of little account.” Babylon redirects worship toward a false god or bends identity toward worthlessness.

This is the connection we cannot afford to miss. Once you lose sight of the incomparable God, you will eventually lose sight of the value and purpose He gave you. When the Creator is diminished, creation becomes easier to despise.

That is one of the deepest contradictions in our culture. We are told to celebrate ourselves while being trained to reject ourselves. We are told our identity is sacred, yet the givenness of our bodies, limits, relationships, and created purpose can be treated as mistakes to overcome. The self is exalted and despised at the same time.

Babylon says, “Reinvent yourself because what you were given is not enough.” God says, “Bring what sin has broken to Me, and I will redeem what I created.”

The gospel does not teach self-worship, but neither does it teach self-contempt. It teaches us to see ourselves truthfully as

creatures made in God's image, fallen through sin, loved by God, and redeemable through Christ.

**If Babylon can make you despise what God created,
it can convince you to surrender what God
intended.**

Azariah to Abednego: Help Replaced by Servitude

Azariah means "The Lord has helped." His name was a testimony. Whatever he faced, Yahweh had been his help.

Abednego almost certainly means "servant of Nabu," also called Nebo, the Babylonian god associated with wisdom and writing. The spelling in Daniel may intentionally alter the divine name, but the basic meaning is widely recognized.⁶

Babylon wanted Azariah to stop seeing himself as one helped by God and start seeing himself as a servant owned by Babylon's god. The change moved him from dependence on Yahweh to bondage under an idol.

The same exchange still happens. God offers help, and Babylon offers mastery. We begin using money, success, sex, politics, technology, or influence as tools, but slowly the tools become masters. What promised to serve us begins demanding that we serve it.

An idol always overpromises and then overcharges. It promises help, but it produces servitude.

Azariah could serve in Babylon's government without becoming the servant Babylon named him to be. His job belonged to the king, but his worship belonged to God.

**You can serve within Babylon without becoming a
servant of Babylon.**

Any Name but the Name God Speaks

Babylon still tries to rename people.

It names us according to our desires, politics, sexuality, achievements, failures, trauma, medical history, social status, or the worst thing we have ever done. Some of those descriptions may identify a real experience, struggle, condition, or chapter. The danger comes when a description becomes the deepest declaration of who we are.

You may have experienced rejection, but rejected is not your name.

You may have failed, but failure is not your identity.

You may be fighting addiction, but addict is not the final word over your life.

You may carry wounds from what somebody did to you, but your trauma does not own you.

You may experience desires that do not align with God's design, but your desires do not have the authority to name you.

What you experience may describe your battle, but it does not have to define your identity.

Our culture often treats affirmation as the highest form of love. If someone claims a label, love is expected to confirm it. Any disagreement is interpreted as rejection. This places Christians in a difficult position because we are commanded to love every person while remaining submitted to what God has spoken.

Genuine love does not require us to surrender truth. Jesus never separated grace from truth. We can honor a person's dignity, listen to their story, defend them from cruelty, and treat them with compassion without pretending that every self-definition is equally true.

The culture did not create humanity. It does not possess the authority to redefine it.

A culture that didn't create you doesn't get to define you.

When Creation Becomes Something to Despise

One of Babylon's deepest strategies is to teach us to despise what God created. The interpretation of Meshach as "I am of little account" gives this spiritual pattern a striking point of contact. Even if we hold the etymology with appropriate humility, the pattern itself is visible all around us: people are increasingly taught to distrust, reject, or despise the givenness of creation.

The body becomes an obstacle rather than a gift. Biological reality becomes an enemy of the internal self. Limits become oppression. Dependence becomes weakness. Aging becomes failure. Ordinary life becomes insufficient. Motherhood and fatherhood become optional accessories rather than sacred stewardship. Singleness becomes evidence of incompleteness. Marriage becomes a contract of convenience instead of covenant. Even our past can become something we wish to erase rather than a story God desires to redeem.

Babylon whispers, "You cannot be whole until you reject what you were given and create something new."

The gospel announces, "You were created by God, broken by sin, pursued by grace, and can be made new in Christ."

Christian identity does not require us to pretend everything in us is already good. Sin has affected our minds, desires, relationships, and bodies. We live in a fallen world, and some people carry profound forms of suffering. Redemption is not shallow positivity. We bring our whole selves to Jesus because every part of us needs His saving and sanctifying work.

But redemption begins with the Creator, not with self-creation. God has the right to tell us what humanity is because humanity was His idea.

Your body matters. Your sex matters. Your story matters. Your relationships matter. None of these are beyond the reach of sin, but neither are they beyond the reach of redemption. We do not find freedom by despising creation. We find freedom by surrendering creation back to the Creator.

Names That Become Prisons

Not every false name comes from the culture. Some names came from your family.

Maybe someone repeatedly called you stupid, weak, unwanted, difficult, dramatic, lazy, or too much. Maybe you learned early that affection had to be earned. Maybe a parent's absence convinced you that you were unworthy of staying for. Maybe abuse taught you to associate shame with your own body.

Some names were attached to you by success. You became the achiever, the strong one, the provider, the pastor, the business owner, the athlete, or the person who always holds everything together. Those names may sound positive, but they can become prisons when you no longer know who you are without performing.

Even ministry can rename us. We can become so identified with what we do for God that we forget who we are with God. If the crowd becomes smaller, the title changes, or the opportunity disappears, we feel as though our identity has been taken from us.

Your assignment is important, but it is not your identity.

Before Jesus performed a miracle, preached a sermon, gathered disciples, or went to the cross, the Father declared His love over Him. "This is my Son, whom I love" (Matthew 3:17 NIV).

Sonship preceded public ministry.

Your work flows from belonging. Your belonging does not flow from your work.

Receiving the Name God Gives

The gospel does not merely remove false labels. It gives us a new identity in Christ.

In Christ, you can be forgiven.

In Christ, you are adopted into God's family.

In Christ, you become a new creation.

In Christ, you are no longer condemned.

In Christ, you are called a saint, a servant, a witness, a child of God, and part of a royal priesthood.

This identity is not positive thinking. It is covenant reality. It is not achieved through performance. It is received by grace through faith and then lived through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus doesn't name you according to the worst chapter of your life. He tells the truth about your sin, carries its judgment at the cross, and gives you a future your past could never produce.

This does not mean believers should deny ongoing struggles. Honesty is part of healing. You can say, "I am experiencing depression," without allowing depression to become your name. You can say, "I am recovering from addiction," without assuming addiction owns your future. You can confess, "I sinned," without believing that sin has the authority to speak louder than the blood of Jesus.

You are not required to lie about the battle in order to live from your identity.

Identity in Christ does not deny your struggle. It declares that your struggle does not get the final word.

Remember Your Name

Daniel spent decades being called Belteshazzar by Babylon. Yet the book bearing his story is not called Belteshazzar. It is called Daniel.

Babylon's label did not outlive God's name.

People may misunderstand you. Institutions may categorize you. Algorithms may reduce you to a demographic profile. Your past may attempt to introduce itself every morning. But the deepest truth about you is not the label Babylon gives. It is what God declares over a life surrendered to Christ.

Remember your name.

You belong to Jesus.

You were bought with a price.

You are being formed into His image.

You are filled with His Spirit.

You are sent with an assignment.

Babylon can call you whatever it wants. You do not have to answer to a name God never gave you.

Reflection

1. What false name has most influenced the way you see yourself?
2. Are you defined primarily by your struggle, success, role, political identity, or relationship with Christ?
3. What does Scripture say is true about you because you belong to Jesus?

Prayer

Father, expose every name I have accepted that You did not give me. Heal the wounds that made those labels believable. Teach me to receive my identity from Jesus rather than from my desires, performance, past, or culture. By Your Spirit, help me live as Your beloved child. Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

Babylon Will Try to Retrain Your Thinking



Once Babylon renames you, it begins retraining the way you think.

Nebuchadnezzar did not only want the young men's labor. He wanted their imagination. He selected gifted young men from Judah's royal and noble families and placed them inside a three-year program of Babylonian education. They were taught the language and literature of the empire so they could eventually serve the king (Daniel 1:3-5).²

This was more than job training. Babylon was forming future leaders.

If the empire could shape how these young men interpreted reality, it would not need to force every decision. They would eventually carry Babylon's assumptions inside themselves. They could remain ethnically Jewish while learning to think like Babylonians.

The same strategy is operating now.

Every day, somebody is discipling your mind.

Your social media feed is discipling you. The shows you binge are discipling you. The music you repeat, the podcasts you

trust, the news you consume, the friends you give access to, and the voices you allow to interpret your experiences are all shaping what you consider true, normal, desirable, frightening, and possible.

Discipleship is not limited to a church building. It is happening anywhere repetition, authority, community, and imitation come together.

Whatever repeatedly holds your attention is helping form your affection.

The Curriculum You Did Not Choose

Most cultural formation is not presented as a lesson. Nobody pauses the movie and announces, “We will now instruct you in a worldview.” The lesson is embedded in the story.

The admirable character lives by one set of values. The foolish character represents another. Certain desires are presented as liberating. Certain convictions are framed as oppressive. Faith is tolerated when it is private, sentimental, and powerless. Biblical authority is often associated with hypocrisy or harm. After enough repetition, assumptions that once would have shocked us begin to feel obvious.

That is how normalization works. An idea is introduced, repeated, humanized, celebrated, and eventually protected from disagreement.

The process is accelerated by digital life. Previous generations encountered cultural messages through a limited number of channels. Our generation carries those channels in a pocket. A person can wake up, reach for a phone, and enter a personalized stream of persuasion before speaking to God, opening Scripture, or looking another human being in the eyes.

The algorithm is not a pastor, but it performs a kind of pastoral function. It identifies your fears, curiosities, wounds, and desires. Then it repeatedly places content in front of you that

will keep you engaged. It does not ask what will make you holy. It asks what will keep you watching.⁵

You may think you are freely selecting content while the platform is steadily selecting the person you are becoming.

This is especially powerful because the feed feels personal. It confirms what you already suspect, magnifies what makes you angry, and surrounds you with people who appear to agree. Over time, outrage can feel like discernment, suspicion can feel like wisdom, and contempt can feel like courage.

The danger is not only that we might believe false ideas. The danger is that our emotional reflexes can be disciplined by Babylon even while our doctrinal statement remains orthodox.

You can believe the right things and still be formed into an impatient, distracted, angry, fearful, lustful, or prideful person.

Learn the Language Without Surrendering Your Mind

Daniel learned Babylon's language. Scripture never condemns him for becoming educated, serving in government, or understanding the culture around him. His knowledge became part of his effectiveness.

God may place you in a university, profession, industry, or institution that does not share your convictions. You do not have to fear learning how that world works. Christians should think deeply, study carefully, create excellently, and serve skillfully. Ignorance is not holiness.

But learning a culture's language is different from surrendering to its system.

Daniel could understand Babylonian literature without treating it as Scripture. He could advise kings without believing they were sovereign. He could become excellent in his work without allowing professional success to own his worship.

You can learn Babylon's language without adopting Babylon's worldview.

This requires a settled authority. If every voice has equal weight, the loudest or most repeated voice will eventually win. Christians do not evaluate Scripture through the culture. We evaluate the culture through Scripture.

That does not mean we refuse to listen, learn, or admit when Christians have been wrong. It means the Word of God remains the final authority that corrects every culture, including church culture and our own preferences.

The Word is both a mirror and a window. It is a mirror that reveals the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. It shows where pride, fear, lust, bitterness, greed, and self-deception have taken root. It is also a window through which we learn to interpret the world. We hold Scripture up to our experiences so that our experiences do not become the authority by which we judge Scripture.

When Babylon Starts Sounding Reasonable

Paul's instruction is direct: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2 NIV).

Conformity happens when external pressure creates an internal pattern. Transformation happens when the Holy Spirit renews our minds through truth.

Many believers want transformation while remaining immersed in the same patterns that produced their confusion. We ask God to renew our minds, but we give Babylon nearly uninterrupted access to them.

If you spend a small portion of your week hearing the Word and the remainder being discipled by Babylon, do not be surprised when Babylon begins sounding more reasonable than God.

At first, the conflict is obvious. Then a question appears: “Is that really what God meant?” After enough repetition, conviction begins to feel extreme. The teaching of Scripture has not changed, but our sense of what is normal has.

This is how a person can slowly move from obedience to uncertainty, from uncertainty to revision, and from revision to rejection without ever deciding, in one dramatic moment, to walk away from God.

Whatever disciplines your thinking will eventually direct your living.

Renewing the Mind

Renewal is not achieved by occasionally adding a Bible verse to a mind saturated with every other voice. It requires an intentional rule of life.

We need Scripture before the feed. We need prayer that does more than present requests and move on. We need worship that reorders our loves. We need biblical community where people know us well enough to challenge our blind spots. We need pastors and teachers who will tell us the truth when the truth is unpopular. We need silence long enough for the noise inside us to settle. We need the Holy Spirit to give us discernment.

Discernment is more than recognizing obvious evil. It is the ability to distinguish between things that appear similar but lead in opposite directions. Babylon rarely presents deception as destruction. It presents it as compassion, freedom, progress, authenticity, safety, success, or justice. Those words describe real goods, but any good detached from God can become an idol.

The Holy Spirit teaches us to ask deeper questions:

What view of humanity does this idea assume?

What does it treat as the highest good?

Who possesses final authority?

What does it say is wrong with the world?

What kind of salvation does it offer?

Who must I become to belong?

Where does this path lead when followed consistently?

We do not ask these questions because we are afraid of ideas. We ask because ideas form people, and formed people build families, churches, institutions, and cultures.

Take Back Your Attention

Attention is one of the most valuable resources you possess. Where your attention goes, your mind and affection often follow.⁵

You cannot control every message that reaches you, but you can establish boundaries around the voices that form you. You can remove an app, unfollow an account, turn off notifications, change what fills your commute, and refuse to begin and end every day inside somebody else's outrage.

This is not legalism. It is stewardship.

Some people need a digital fast because their souls have forgotten what quiet feels like. Some need to stop consuming political content that makes them angrier but not more prayerful. Some need to stop calling entertainment harmless when it continually awakens desires they are asking God to put to death. Some need to return to long-form reading because constant scrolling has damaged their ability to think deeply.

The goal is not isolation from culture. The goal is freedom from unconscious formation.

God gave Daniel unusual understanding and wisdom inside Babylon. He can do the same for you. You can become informed without becoming indoctrinated, engaged without becoming absorbed, and excellent without becoming owned.

Babylon may provide part of your education. It does not get to possess your mind.

Reflection

1. Which voices receive the greatest amount of your attention each week?
2. How have your media habits affected your peace, purity, compassion, courage, and ability to concentrate?
3. What daily or weekly practice would help Scripture regain formative authority in your life?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, renew my mind. Reveal the voices and habits that have shaped me away from Jesus. Give me wisdom to understand my culture without surrendering to it. Restore my attention, deepen my hunger for Scripture, and teach me to recognize the difference between truth and a convincing counterfeit. Amen.

CHAPTER FIVE

Babylon Will Try to Normalize Compromise



Babylon does not usually begin by asking you to abandon everything you believe.

It asks for one adjustment.

One exception.

One line you never intended to cross.

It tells you everybody is doing it. It assures you that your convictions are unnecessarily strict. It promises the decision is temporary and the consequences are manageable.

Compromise rarely arrives looking like rebellion. It usually looks reasonable.

The King's Table

Daniel and his friends were assigned food and wine from the king's table. To an observer, the offer would have looked like favor. These young captives were being given access to the finest provisions in the empire.

But Daniel recognized that something in his covenant with God was at stake. The text does not explain every detail behind his

concern. The food may have violated Israel's dietary laws, been associated with idol worship, or represented dependence on the king. Whatever the complete reason, Daniel understood that participation would defile him.

So Daniel resolved not to do it (Daniel 1:8).

He settled the issue in his heart before the plate was placed in front of him. His conviction made the decision before the pressure had the opportunity to make it for him.

If you don't establish your convictions before the pressure, the pressure will establish them for you.

Many people wait until temptation becomes immediate before deciding what they believe. They enter the relationship before establishing sexual boundaries. They accept the promotion before asking what the new expectations will require. They join the conversation before deciding whether they will participate in gossip. They wait until money is in reach before determining their standard of integrity.

When emotion, opportunity, attraction, fear, and social pressure arrive together, clarity becomes much more difficult. Resolve is a decision made in the presence of God before the moment of testing.

The Slow Movement of a Boundary

Compromise usually occurs gradually.

A conviction that once governed our behavior becomes a preference. A preference becomes an aspiration. An aspiration becomes something we remember feeling strongly about. Eventually, the line has moved so far that our former obedience appears extreme.

This happens because repeated exposure can dull the conscience. The first encounter produces discomfort. The tenth produces familiarity. The hundredth becomes background

noise. Nothing in God's Word changed, but our internal alarm grew quiet.

Babylon knows it does not have to reverse your beliefs immediately. It only needs to reduce your resistance.

That is why small acts of obedience matter. Every time you tell the truth when a lie would be convenient, you strengthen integrity. Every time you turn away from lust, you train your desires. Every time you forgive, give generously, honor your marriage covenant, keep your word, or refuse gossip, you are becoming the kind of person who can remain faithful under greater pressure.

Character is formed through repeated decisions long before it is revealed in a crisis.

When Tolerance Becomes Celebration

We should not be surprised when Babylon acts like Babylon. People who do not follow Jesus will not naturally live under the authority of Jesus. The Church should be known for patience, compassion, hospitality, and a willingness to walk with people through honest questions and complicated stories.

The crisis comes when the Church begins thinking like Babylon.

It comes when Christians celebrate what God calls sin and apologize for what God calls truth. It comes when biblical teaching is adjusted to avoid cultural disapproval. It comes when love is redefined as affirmation and holiness is treated as harm.

There is an important difference between welcoming a person and affirming every belief or behavior. Jesus welcomed sinners, ate with them, defended the vulnerable, and extended mercy. He also called people to repentance and new life. Grace was never indifference toward sin. Grace was the power that rescued people from it.

The Church should be the safest place to tell the truth about your struggle and the most dangerous place to remain comfortable in bondage.

We do not condemn people from a distance. We walk with them toward Jesus. But we cannot help people find freedom from a bondage we have been pressured to rename as blessing.

Love that refuses to tell the truth may feel kind in the moment, but it cannot lead anyone into freedom.

Cultural Pressure and Moral Courage

Modern compromise is often enforced socially before it is enforced legally. People fear being misunderstood, excluded, reported, mocked, unfollowed, or passed over. The furnace may not contain literal fire, but the threat of reputational loss can still produce public conformity.

Some workplaces require employees to participate in messages that conflict with their faith. Some schools treat biblical convictions as evidence of harm. Some families make continued relationship conditional upon complete affirmation. Some digital communities punish even respectful disagreement.

Christians must prepare to respond with both courage and wisdom.

Not every disagreement requires a public battle. Daniel asked the chief official for permission and proposed a respectful alternative. His conviction did not remove his wisdom. There are times to appeal, ask questions, seek accommodation, speak privately, or accept a limited consequence without turning every conflict into a performance.

But there are also moments when silence becomes agreement and participation becomes worship. Wisdom cannot become an excuse for cowardice.

We must learn the difference between being personally uncomfortable and being asked to disobey God. Not every

inconvenience is persecution. Not every policy disagreement is a furnace. Christians damage their witness when they exaggerate every conflict. At the same time, we cannot allow the misuse of the word persecution to keep us from recognizing genuine coercion.

The question is simple: What does faithfulness to Jesus require in this moment?

Compromise Inside the Heart

It is easier to identify compromise in public controversies than in private habits.

We may be courageous about cultural issues while quietly compromising with greed, pornography, bitterness, dishonesty, prayerlessness, pride, or an unteachable spirit. We can refuse to bow to a public ideology while worshiping success in private.

Babylon does not care which idol receives your allegiance as long as Jesus does not.

A believer can denounce moral compromise and still mistreat a spouse. A pastor can defend biblical authority while building a ministry around personal ambition. A business owner can post Scripture and exploit employees. A parent can protect children from cultural deception but provoke them through anger and hypocrisy.

Holiness begins where nobody is applauding.

Before we confront the compromise around us, we must invite the Holy Spirit to confront the compromise within us.

Resolve Again

Maybe compromise has taken you farther than you intended to go. What began as an exception has become a pattern. You find yourself doing things you once believed you would never do.⁵

Shame will tell you to hide. Jesus invites you to return.

Repentance is not humiliation. It is the grace of God reopening the road home. Bring the compromise into the light. Confess it to God. Tell a mature believer who can pray with you and hold you accountable. Remove access where necessary. Make restitution if your choices harmed someone. Rebuild the boundary you allowed to move.

Do not wait for a dramatic emotional moment. Resolve again.

God's mercy is not permission to continue. It is power to change.

You are not too far gone. You are not permanently disqualified from obedience. The same Spirit who reveals compromise will empower repentance.

Reflection

1. Where has a clear conviction slowly become negotiable in your life?
2. Which consequence do you fear most: rejection, lost opportunity, relational conflict, or discomfort?
3. What decision do you need to settle before the next moment of pressure arrives?

Prayer

God, search my heart and reveal where compromise has become normal. Forgive me for the lines I have crossed and the convictions I have allowed to move. Give me a tender conscience, a courageous spirit, and wisdom to respond with both grace and truth. Today I resolve again to honor You. Amen.

CHAPTER SIX

Babylon Will Demand Your Worship



Renaming was never the final objective. Retraining was not the final objective. Normalizing compromise was not the final objective.

The final objective was worship.

Nebuchadnezzar gathered officials from across the empire and set up an enormous golden image. Music created the atmosphere. Authority delivered the command. Social conformity created the pressure. Threat supplied the consequence. When the sound began, everyone was required to fall down and worship (Daniel 3:1-6).

Private disagreement was permitted only as long as public allegiance remained unquestioned.

That is still Babylon's demand.

You can believe what you want privately. Just do not allow your faith to affect your speech, participation, parenting, business, sexuality, voting, generosity, or public life. Keep Jesus personal, sentimental, and silent. Believe in Him as Savior if you want, but do not obey Him as Lord where obedience becomes visible.

Babylon will tolerate your faith until your faith refuses to kneel.

Worship Is Allegiance

Worship is more than singing. Worship is allegiance.

It answers the question: Who has the final word over my life?

Everybody worships. Even people who reject religion organize their lives around something they treat as ultimate. We build identity, make sacrifices, establish moral boundaries, and seek salvation according to what we worship.

Some worship approval. They will surrender conviction to remain accepted.

Some worship comfort. They will avoid any obedience that produces inconvenience.

Some worship success. They will sacrifice family, integrity, and spiritual health to achieve it.

Some worship politics. They interpret every person and issue through party allegiance.

Some worship romance, sexuality, children, money, nation, influence, or self.

Most idols begin as good gifts. They become gods when they receive the trust, sacrifice, identity, and obedience that belong to the Giver.

An idol is anything you cannot disobey without feeling that your life is over.

The Atmosphere of the Image

Nebuchadnezzar did more than issue a command. He created an atmosphere. The image was impressive. The officials were gathered. The music played. Everybody moved together.

Collective participation made obedience feel inevitable.

This is how social pressure works. When everybody around you appears to bow, standing can feel irrational. You begin

questioning whether your convictions are loving, necessary, or even sane. Isolation magnifies pressure.

Our culture creates its own liturgies. Liturgies are repeated practices that shape love and allegiance. Advertising tells us what to desire. Political rallies tell us whom to fear and trust. Social media teaches us how to seek approval. Entertainment provides stories of sin and salvation. Shopping promises renewal through acquisition. Public slogans identify the words required to demonstrate belonging.

Not every cultural practice is worship, but every practice forms us. When a practice requires us to contradict God in order to belong, the image has been raised.

The test often sounds small: say the words, display the symbol, attend the event, repeat the approved phrase, remain silent about the truth, or keep your convictions from influencing the decision.

But worship is revealed through embodied allegiance. Bowing is physical. It is possible to say internally, “I do not believe this,” while our participation publicly communicates the opposite.

There are moments when Christians must decide that internal disagreement is not enough.

The Furnace

Every idol eventually produces a furnace.

Idols promise freedom but require increasing sacrifice. Approval punishes honesty. Success consumes rest. Lust destroys intimacy. Greed makes generosity feel threatening. Political idolatry turns neighbors into enemies. The self becomes a cruel god because it must constantly be affirmed and reinvented.

Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace made the cost explicit: bow or burn.

Modern furnaces are often relational, economic, institutional, or reputational. A believer may lose an invitation, promotion, friendship, platform, client, or sense of belonging. In parts of the world, disciples still face imprisonment, violence, and death.

We should not manufacture persecution or behave offensively and call the reaction spiritual warfare. But neither should we assume that obedience will always be rewarded by the culture.

Jesus never promised social approval. He promised His presence.

The three Hebrew men entered the fire, but they did not enter it alone. Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth figure walking with them in the furnace. God did not keep them from the fire, but He met them in it.

Sometimes faith keeps you from the furnace. Sometimes faithfulness takes you through it. In either case, Jesus remains Lord.

The Wilderness Offer

The same conflict appears in the temptation of Jesus. Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and offered them without the suffering of the cross. The price was worship.

The temptation was not only about bowing. It was about receiving a kingdom through an unauthorized path. Jesus was offered influence without obedience, authority without sacrifice, and a crown without a cross.

He answered, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matthew 4:10 NIV).

The enemy still offers shortcuts. Compromise your character and the platform can grow. Adjust the message and the room may applaud. Hide the truth and the relationship may remain comfortable. Bend the standard and the opportunity may stay open.

But anything gained through misplaced worship will eventually own the worshiper.

Jesus chose the cross because love and obedience mattered more than the shortcut. His resurrection proved that surrender to the Father is never wasted.

If You Cannot Feel the Pressure

The pressure of Babylon is real. If we cannot feel any tension between the kingdom of God and the spirit of our age, we should not automatically assume the pressure has disappeared. We may have become desensitized.

Salt should remain distinct. Light should be recognizable in darkness. A disciple whose life never conflicts with Babylon may have quietly adjusted to its pattern.

This does not mean Christians should pursue conflict. Faithfulness will create enough conflict without our manufacturing more. It means we examine whether our desire for acceptance has silenced obedience.

Have you lent your agreement to something you knew was false?

Have you kept silent when love required truthful courage?

Have you treated Jesus as someone you admire rather than the Lord you obey?

The real battle has always been about worship.⁵

Settle Your Allegiance

Babylon will always operate like Babylon. That is not the question.

The question is whether God's people will remember who they are.

We do not control every cultural moment or consequence. We do control where we place our allegiance. Before the music

plays, before the crowd bows, before the furnace is heated, settle the question:

Jesus is Lord.

His Word is true.

His grace is sufficient.

His presence is worth more than Babylon's approval.

The next chapters are built around three commitments that make this allegiance visible. We will not bow to Babylon. We will bless Babylon. We will multiply in Babylon.

Reflection

1. What good gift is most likely to compete for your ultimate allegiance?
2. Where are you tempted to maintain private belief while practicing public compliance?
3. What would it look like to settle the lordship of Jesus before the music begins?

Prayer

Jesus, You alone are worthy of my worship. Reveal every idol that competes for my allegiance. Give me courage to obey when obedience is costly, wisdom to avoid unnecessary offense, and confidence that Your presence is greater than every furnace. I declare again that You are Lord. Amen.

PART THREE

Faithful in Babylon



Recognizing Babylon is not enough. Discernment must become discipleship. God's people need more than a list of everything wrong with the world. We need a faithful way to live within it. Daniel and the exiles show us a posture that combines conviction, contribution, courage, and mission.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I Will Not Bow



There are moments when obedience costs something.

It may cost approval, comfort, opportunity, reputation, or relationship. In those moments, we discover whether Jesus is merely someone we admire or the Lord we obey.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had served Babylon with excellence. They held positions of responsibility. They had not organized a revolt, insulted the king, or refused every form of participation in public life. But Nebuchadnezzar eventually demanded something they could not give.

Their worship belonged to God alone.

When the king gave them another opportunity to bow, they responded with remarkable confidence and restraint. They did not need to defend themselves. God was able to deliver them from the furnace. But even if He did not, they would not serve Babylon's gods or worship the image (Daniel 3:16-18).

They honored the king without obeying his sinful command.

They refused to bow without becoming what they opposed.

Conviction Without Contempt

Some believers hear a message about courage and immediately become louder, harsher, and more combative. They treat rudeness as boldness and unnecessary offense as evidence of persecution.

That is not the spirit of Daniel.

The three Hebrew men addressed Nebuchadnezzar with honor. They did not mock him or attack his appearance, intelligence, or motives. Their answer was firm because their allegiance was settled, not because their emotions were out of control.

Insecurity needs to win every argument. Conviction only needs to remain faithful.

We can disagree without dehumanizing. We can refuse participation without insulting the people who participate. We can speak the truth without exaggeration, slander, or contempt. We can accept consequences without acting shocked that Babylon does not celebrate obedience to God.

Christians should be difficult to intimidate and easy to respect.

Courage does not require cruelty, and kindness does not require compromise.

Jesus embodied this perfectly. He showed tenderness toward broken people and severity toward religious hypocrisy. He welcomed children, touched lepers, ate with sinners, forgave enemies, confronted deception, and never adjusted truth to make obedience easier.

Grace and truth are not competing options. In Jesus, they are perfectly united.

Even If He Does Not

The courage of the three men was not rooted in certainty about the outcome. They believed God was able to deliver them. They also declared that even if He did not, they would remain faithful.

That is mature faith.

Immature faith says, "I will obey if God gives me what I asked for." Mature faith says, "God is worthy even when I do not receive the outcome I want."

We believe God heals. We believe He provides. We believe He opens doors, restores relationships, performs miracles, and delivers His people. We pray with expectation because God is able.

But God's ability does not place Him under our control.

Sometimes the healing takes longer than we hoped. Sometimes the relationship is not restored. Sometimes the door remains closed. Sometimes obedience leads into the furnace before it leads out of it.

If our worship depends upon the outcome, then the outcome has become our god.

**Faith does not require certainty about the outcome.
It requires confidence in the worthiness of God.**

Job worshiped after devastating loss. Habakkuk rejoiced while fields were empty. Paul remained faithful while imprisoned. Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done," before going to the cross.

This kind of allegiance cannot be manipulated by circumstances. Babylon loses leverage over people who have already decided that Jesus is worthy.

Courage Is Decided in Advance

The men did not invent their convictions while standing in front of the furnace. Their refusal in Daniel 3 was connected to the earlier resolve of Daniel 1. Small acts of obedience had formed the courage required for a public crisis.

Nobody suddenly becomes courageous. Courage is built as we repeatedly choose faithfulness while the stakes are still small.

Tell the truth in ordinary conversations.

Keep your word when breaking it would be convenient.

Refuse entertainment that corrupts your imagination.

Honor God with your money before financial pressure arrives.

Practice sexual integrity before attraction overwhelms wisdom.

Pray for people you disagree with before the disagreement becomes personal.

Faithfulness has muscle memory.

When you obey God in quiet places, you are becoming the person who can stand in public ones.

When Silence Becomes Agreement

There is a time to remain silent. Proverbs celebrates restraint, and Jesus sometimes refused to answer dishonest accusations. Not every comment deserves a response. Not every online controversy needs another Christian voice added to the noise.

But there are also moments when silence communicates agreement.

We must ask whether our quietness is Spirit-led wisdom or fear wearing the clothes of wisdom. Are we withholding words because they would not help, or because we are afraid of what obedience may cost?

There may be a moment when a parent must speak to a child with clarity. A leader may need to protect a team from

confusion. An employee may need to explain respectfully why participation violates conscience. A pastor may need to preach a truth the congregation did not come to celebrate.

We should not speak merely to prove that we are unafraid. We speak because truth serves people.

Your responsibility is obedience. The outcome belongs to God.

Three Personal Commitments

Refusing to bow becomes practical through commitments like these:

I will not live what I know is false.

My private behavior will come under the lordship of Jesus. I will not demand courage from the culture while protecting compromise in my own life.

I will not repeat what I know is false.

I will not participate in gossip, slander, ideological slogans, flattering lies, or accusations I have not verified. Satan is called the accuser. I will not lend my mouth to his work.

I will not lend my agreement to what I know is false.

I will treat every person with dignity while refusing to affirm what contradicts God's Word. I will not bow externally while attempting to maintain internal innocence.

These commitments require humility. We can be wrong about our interpretation, facts, or response. Biblical courage remains teachable. It listens carefully, checks assumptions, seeks wise counsel, and submits personal conviction to Scripture.

Boldness without humility becomes pride. Humility without boldness becomes passivity. The Holy Spirit produces both.

You Will Not Stand Alone

The three men stood together.⁸

Daniel had friends before the furnace appeared. Their relationships were formed in prayer, shared conviction, and mutual courage. Babylon isolates because isolated people are easier to intimidate.

You need believers who will remind you who you are when the pressure becomes loud. You need people who will pray with you before the meeting, tell you the truth when you drift, and stand beside you when faithfulness becomes costly.

Church is not an audience you visit. It is a covenant people among whom you are formed.

Do not wait until crisis to build community. By then you may accept support from whoever is available, even if their counsel pulls you away from obedience.

You were not designed to resist Babylon alone.

I Will Not Bow

This is not a declaration of hostility. It is a declaration of worship.

I will love people.

I will honor people.

I will listen before assuming.

I will speak with grace.

I will admit when I am wrong.

I will serve my city.

But I will not bow to Babylon.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Reflection

1. Where is obedience most likely to cost you approval or opportunity?
2. Are your words marked by courage and honor, or by fear and contempt?
3. Who stands with you spiritually, and who are you strengthening to stand?

Prayer

God, settle my allegiance before the moment of pressure. Give me courage without cruelty, conviction without pride, and love without compromise. Whether You deliver me from the furnace or meet me within it, I will worship You. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I Will Bless Babylon



Refusing to bow is only half of our assignment.

Some Christians are prepared to resist Babylon but not to love the people living there. They can identify what is wrong with culture, explain why judgment is deserved, and describe every institution that has been corrupted. But their discernment has not produced compassion.

God calls His people to something more difficult than denunciation.

He calls us to bless Babylon.

Seek the Good of the City

Jeremiah wrote to Jewish exiles living in Babylon. These were not immigrants who had freely chosen a new home. Babylon had invaded their land, destroyed their city, burned the temple, and carried them away.

If anyone had a reason to resent Babylon, they did.

Yet God told them to build houses, plant gardens, form families, increase in number, and seek the peace and prosperity of the city. They were even commanded to pray for it because its flourishing would affect their own (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

God did not tell the exiles to spend seventy years complaining.

He did not tell them to worship Babylon, but He did tell them to serve within it.

He did not ask them to call evil good, but He did command them to seek the good of people who did not share their covenant.

We resist Babylon's spirit while seeking Babylon's good.

This is a difficult assignment because it refuses two easier options. Assimilation blesses the city by surrendering truth. Isolation preserves conviction by abandoning the city. Biblical mission carries both truth and love into the city.

People Should See the Love of Jesus

Jesus called His followers the light of the world. Light is not protected by hiding it. It is placed where darkness makes it useful. Jesus said people should see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

People should hear the truth from us, but they should also see the love of Jesus through us.

Our cities should be better because churches are present. Hungry people should be fed. Children should be mentored. Families should be strengthened. Addicts should find pathways to freedom. People in crisis should receive care. Students should encounter adults who believe in them. Foster children should find homes. Schools should meet volunteers who arrive to serve rather than control. First responders should be prayed for and supported. Pregnant women should receive practical help. The elderly should not be forgotten.

The gospel cannot be reduced to social action, but a gospel that never produces love of neighbor has not been fully obeyed.

We do not serve as a public-relations strategy. We serve because people bear the image of God. We do not perform

kindness to earn permission to preach. We show kindness because the Christ we preach is kind.

Pray for Leaders You Did Not Choose

Jeremiah told the exiles to pray for Babylon. The New Testament tells believers to pray for kings and all who are in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Those instructions were not written under governments perfectly aligned with biblical values.

Prayer for leaders is not agreement with leaders.

We can oppose a policy and still pray for the person who signed it. We can vote against a candidate and still ask God to give that leader wisdom, restraint, justice, humility, and an encounter with truth. We can honor an office without idolizing the person who occupies it.

Some believers only pray for leaders from their preferred party. That reveals political allegiance more than biblical obedience.

Pray for the governor. Pray for the president. Pray for the mayor, school-board members, judges, police chiefs, teachers, and business leaders. Pray when you agree and when you do not.

Prayer keeps opposition from becoming hatred. It reminds us that the person making decisions is also a soul who will stand before God.

Truth Is Part of the Blessing

Blessing Babylon does not mean affirming Babylon's values.

Daniel blessed Nebuchadnezzar by interpreting dreams truthfully. That truth was not always comfortable. At one point Daniel pleaded with the king to renounce his sins, do what was right, and show kindness to the oppressed (Daniel 4:27).

Daniel's service included moral clarity.

We do not bless people by hiding truths necessary for freedom. A doctor does not love a patient by concealing a diagnosis. A parent does not love a child by affirming every destructive desire. A pastor does not love a church by avoiding every passage that might make people uncomfortable.

Truth becomes a blessing when it is spoken for the good of the listener rather than the ego of the speaker.

Before speaking, we should ask:

Am I trying to help this person or defeat them?

Have I listened well enough to understand the real question?

Is my tone consistent with the character of Jesus?

Am I willing to remain present after I tell the truth?

Do I want their restoration, or do I only want to be proven right?

The truth can offend, but we do not have to make it more offensive through arrogance.

Excellence Is a Form of Witness

Daniel became known for exceptional wisdom, integrity, and reliability. Even his enemies struggled to find corruption or negligence in his work (Daniel 6:4).

That should challenge every believer who works in Babylon.

Your witness includes the quality of your work. Arriving late, cutting corners, mistreating customers, ignoring details, and using spiritual language to cover incompetence do not glorify God.

Spirit-filled should never mean careless.

Christians should be among the most trustworthy employees, thoughtful leaders, honest business owners, prepared teachers, compassionate caregivers, and creative contributors in a city.

Excellence does not save anyone, but it can make the character of our King visible.

Daniel did not become excellent to gain approval. Excellence flowed from stewardship. He understood that even when serving a human king, his life belonged to God.

Love Your Actual Neighbor

It is possible to love “the city” as an idea while remaining impatient with the person living next door.

Mission becomes real through names, conversations, meals, inconveniences, and repeated presence. It may look like caring for a coworker going through divorce, helping a neighbor repair something, coaching a child who is not yours, listening to someone whose story challenges your assumptions, or opening your home.

You do not need a platform to bless Babylon. You need availability.

Many people will encounter the character of Jesus through a believer before they understand the claims of Jesus. Your patience, integrity, hospitality, generosity, and courage can create a question the gospel answers.

This does not place the weight of someone’s salvation on your perfection. We are witnesses, not saviors. It simply means our lives should not continually contradict the message we proclaim.

The Church as a Sign of Another Kingdom

The local church should become a preview of God’s kingdom in the middle of Babylon.⁵

In a divided culture, the Church becomes a reconciled family. In an isolated culture, the Church practices community. In a disposable culture, the Church remains faithful. In a consumer culture, the Church becomes generous. In a confused culture, the Church speaks truth. In a harsh culture, the Church extends

mercy. In a powerless culture, the Church ministers in the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit.

We will not perfectly embody the kingdom. We are still being sanctified. But when we repent, forgive, reconcile, serve, worship, and carry one another's burdens, the world receives a glimpse of another King.

Babylon should feel the difference when the Church is present.

Reflection

1. Do people primarily experience your cultural convictions as anger or as courageous love?
2. What practical need in your city could you help address?
3. Which leader do you find hardest to pray for, and what would faithful prayer sound like?

Prayer

Father, give me Your heart for the city where You have planted me. Keep me from bitterness, withdrawal, and contempt. Show me how to serve people without surrendering truth. Make my work excellent, my prayers sincere, my words gracious, and my life a visible expression of Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER NINE

I Will Multiply in Babylon



Babylon expects pressure to make the Church smaller, quieter, and more private.

God tells His people to increase and not decrease.

Jeremiah instructed the exiles to marry, raise sons and daughters, build families, and multiply in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:6). Captivity was not permission to abandon the future. Darkness was not a reason to stop forming another generation.

God's people were not merely supposed to survive Babylon. They were called to remain fruitful within it.

Do Not Surrender the Future

Some Christians look at the world and wonder whether it is responsible to bring children into such difficult times. The concern is understandable. Parents recognize the confusion and pressure the next generation will face.

But God has never required ideal conditions before calling His people to faithfulness.

Moses was born under a death sentence. Samuel grew up while Israel's spiritual leadership was corrupt. Esther was raised in

exile. Daniel was likely young when he was taken to Babylon. Timothy learned faith from his mother and grandmother in a religiously mixed environment.

The darkness of a generation does not make children less valuable. It makes discipleship more urgent.

We should not merely have children. We should form disciples. We must teach them Scripture, help them encounter the Holy Spirit, answer difficult questions, model repentance, establish wise boundaries, and prepare them to carry conviction with compassion.

Protection matters, but preparation matters too. If we only shelter children from every difficult idea, they may become vulnerable when protection is no longer possible. We teach them not only what Christians believe, but why. We help them recognize the stories underneath cultural claims. We give them a faith sturdy enough to ask questions and a community safe enough to bring those questions home.

**We are not raising children to hide from Babylon.
We are raising disciples who can stand within it.**

For believers called to singleness, multiplication remains equally central. Jesus and Paul demonstrated that spiritual fruitfulness is not limited to biological family. Every Christian can mentor, disciple, serve, teach, encourage, evangelize, and invest in those coming behind them.

The kingdom multiplies through faithful people who give away what God has placed within them.

From One Room to the Ends of the Earth

Jesus never intended the gospel to remain in one room, one city, one culture, or one generation.

Before His ascension, He promised that the Holy Spirit would empower His followers to become witnesses in Jerusalem,

Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The movement was local and outward at the same time.⁹

Jerusalem represented where they were. Judea represented the surrounding region. Samaria required crossing cultural hostility. The ends of the earth required multiplication beyond anything the first disciples could personally control.

This is how the kingdom advances. Jesus saves people, fills them with His Spirit, forms them into His image, and sends them back into homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and cities as witnesses.

The kingdom does not transform culture primarily through domination. It transforms culture by transforming people.

Changed people build different families.

They lead differently.

They handle money differently.

They treat bodies differently.

They use authority differently.

They bring integrity into business, truth into education, compassion into health care, courage into government, creativity into the arts, and the presence of Jesus into ordinary places.

Kingdom, Not Control

When Christians speak of transforming culture, people sometimes hear a desire to seize power and force religious conformity.

That is not the kingdom Jesus modeled.

Jesus did not advance His kingdom through manipulation, coercion, or violence. He proclaimed good news, healed the sick, delivered the oppressed, confronted hypocrisy, welcomed outsiders, called people to repentance, died for His enemies, and rose from the grave.

The early Church did not possess the machinery of Rome. It possessed the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers prayed, preached, served, suffered, planted churches, formed communities, and refused to worship Caesar. Their faithful witness spread through an empire that often opposed them.

We should participate responsibly in public life, vote according to conscience, advocate for justice, protect religious liberty, and seek laws that promote genuine human flourishing. Government matters because people matter.

But political power cannot accomplish spiritual regeneration. A law may restrain evil, protect life, or preserve freedom. It cannot create a new heart. The kingdom advances through the gospel, prayer, repentance, discipleship, mercy, truth, healing, and Spirit-empowered witness.

Our goal is not to make Babylon pretend to be the Church. Our goal is to be the Church faithfully within Babylon.

The Holy Spirit and the Mission

Jesus did not send His disciples into enemy territory with human determination alone. He told them to wait for the promise of the Father.

The mission requires the Holy Spirit.

We need His power to witness, His gifts to serve, His wisdom to discern, His fruit to reflect Jesus, and His courage to remain faithful. Cultural pressure cannot be overcome through anger, personality, or political strategy. We need a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was not given to make believers spiritually entertained. The Spirit came to empower witness. He enables ordinary people to carry an extraordinary gospel across barriers of language, culture, class, and geography.⁹

Some believers are informed about Babylon but spiritually empty. They can explain the threat but carry no power to bring freedom. We need more than analysis. We need prayer,

holiness, spiritual gifts, compassion, bold proclamation, and dependence upon God.

The answer to spiritual Babylon is a Spirit-filled Church.

Increase and Do Not Decrease

Multiplication requires intentionality.

Churches do not drift into disciple-making. Leaders do not accidentally reproduce themselves. Children do not inherit mature faith through biology. The next generation must be taught, loved, corrected, empowered, and released.

Every believer should ask, “Who am I helping become more like Jesus?”

Your answer may be your children, a new believer, a small group, a coworker, a student, or a young leader. You do not need to know everything before helping someone take their next step. Share what God has taught you. Read Scripture together. Pray together. Invite them into your life. Demonstrate how faith shapes decisions.

Multiplication also means planting churches. There are cities and neighborhoods where people need a healthy, Spirit-filled, gospel-centered church. A church that only gathers resources for itself has forgotten the outward movement of the kingdom.

We make room because people still need Jesus.

We raise leaders because the mission is larger than one personality.

We plant churches because every city deserves a gospel witness.

We send people because the kingdom was never meant to stop with us.

In California as It Is in Heaven

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He told them to ask, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10 NIV).

That prayer is not an escape from earth. It is an invitation for God’s rule and will to invade the places where we live.

For us, that prayer has become specific:

In California as it is in heaven.

We want to see lost people saved in California as in heaven.

Families restored in California as in heaven.

Addictions broken in California as in heaven.

Churches planted in California as in heaven.

Truth proclaimed, mercy extended, leaders raised, and the next generation filled with the Holy Spirit in California as in heaven.

California is not too dark for the gospel. No city is too secular, too divided, too expensive, too resistant, or too spiritually contested for Jesus to build His Church.

We are not naive about the battle. We know the pressure is real. But darkness does not intimidate light. The gospel does not require favorable polling before it becomes powerful. The Holy Spirit does not need cultural permission to move.

God has not called us to surrender territory and wait for heaven. He has called us to pray, serve, preach, disciple, plant, and believe for His kingdom to come where we are.

Reflection

1. Who are you intentionally helping become more like Jesus?
2. Where have fear or pessimism caused you to expect decrease rather than multiplication?
3. What would “Your kingdom come” look like in your home, workplace, church, and city?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, fill me again and make me a faithful witness. Deliver me from fear, passivity, and cultural pessimism. Help me form disciples, strengthen families, raise leaders, and carry the gospel into the places You have assigned to me. Let Your kingdom come and Your will be done here as it is in heaven. Amen.

CONCLUSION

We Were Built for This



Babylon will try to name you.

Remember who God says you are.

Babylon will try to retrain your thinking.

Renew your mind in the truth.

Babylon will try to normalize compromise.

Resolve before the pressure arrives.

Babylon will demand your worship.

Give your allegiance to Jesus alone.

The pressure is real, but this is not a moment for fear. God has never been surprised by the generation into which He sends His people. He raised Joseph for Egypt, Moses for Pharaoh, Esther for Persia, Daniel for Babylon, and the early Church for Rome.

He placed you here.

You may feel inadequate, but the assignment has never depended upon human sufficiency. God works through surrendered people filled with His Spirit.

Thirteen years ago, when Discovery Church began, we could not see every person God would save, every family He would restore, every leader He would raise, or every door He would

open. We could not imagine all the ways God would build faith, generosity, endurance, and capacity within us.

But God was already able to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine.

And the God who brought us this far is not finished.

There are more people to reach.

More disciples to form.

More leaders to send.

More churches to plant.

More cities to bless.

There is more that God wants to do around us, and there is more of His power that He wants to release through us.

This is not only a word for one church or one state. Wherever God has planted you, your location is part of your assignment. Carry the presence of Jesus into your home, office, classroom, neighborhood, and city.

Stand without bowing.

Serve without surrendering.

Multiply without decreasing.

We will not bow to Babylon.

We will bless Babylon.

We will multiply in Babylon.

We were built for this.

Notes

Biblical passages are cited in the text. These notes identify the principal historical, linguistic, theological, and cultural sources that informed the discussion.

1. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020), especially parts 1 and 3, traces the modern movement toward an identity grounded in inner feeling, personal autonomy, and self-expression.
2. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 23 (InterVarsity Press, 1978), commentary on Daniel 1; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30, rev. ed. (Zondervan Academic, 2019), commentary on Daniel 1:1–7.
3. Goldingay, *Daniel*, commentary on Daniel 10:13. The passage presents visible empire and invisible spiritual opposition operating within the same conflict.
4. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1999), commentary on Revelation 17–18.
5. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Baker Academic, 2009), especially chapters 1 and 3, explains how repeated cultural practices shape desire, imagination, allegiance, and worship. The applications to digital formation, consumerism, political identity, and the local church are the author's.
6. Baldwin, *Daniel*, 80–81; Goldingay, *Daniel*, commentary on Daniel 1:6–7. Both discuss the Babylonian names and the difficulty of reconstructing some original Akkadian forms. Belteshazzar is associated with Babylonian deity and protection, Shadrach may be related to Aku or the idea of

reverential fear, and Abednego is commonly understood as “servant of Nabu.”

7. Baldwin, Daniel, 81, notes the Akkadian *mesaku*, “I am of little account.” Another common proposal relates Meshach to *Mi-sha-Aku*, “Who is what Aku is?” “I am despised” expresses the pastoral force of the first proposal, while “I am of little account” remains the more cautious translation.
8. Baldwin, Daniel, commentary on Daniel 3; Goldingay, Daniel, commentary on Daniel 3.
9. Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), on the Holy Spirit’s role in empowering the Church’s mission and witness.

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A Declaration for This Moment

Jesus Christ is Lord.

His Word is truth.

My identity will be received from my Creator, not constructed by my culture.

My mind will be renewed by Scripture, not disciplined by Babylon.

My convictions will be settled before pressure arrives.

My worship belongs to God alone.

I will love people without surrendering truth.

I will speak truth without surrendering love.

I will not live what I know is false.

I will not repeat what I know is false.

I will not lend my agreement to what I know is false.

I will seek the good of the city where God has planted me.

I will pray for leaders, serve my neighbors, strengthen families, and proclaim the gospel.

I will make disciples and invest in the next generation.

I will depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

I will not retreat.

I will not bow.

I was built for Babylon.

About the Author

Dr. Jason Hanash is the founding and lead pastor of Discovery Church in Bakersfield, California, which he leads alongside his wife, Dr. Veronica Hanash. He has served as a pastor since 2006. A United States Navy veteran who served in Iraq, Jason carries a passion to help people encounter Jesus, become disciples, and live with courageous faith in the real world.

He is the author of *Christ Formed in You* and *The Three Dimensions of Leadership*. Jason and Veronica are committed to raising leaders, strengthening families, planting churches, and seeing the kingdom of God advance in California and beyond.