

Lines in the Sand

Selected Passages (Daniel)

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Next week, will be our Missions Weekend. It's where we celebrate to the best of our ability ALL we are doing locally, nationally, and around the world as it relates to missions.

Many of our mission partners will be here sharing in Life Groups. We will have tables set up where you can learn more about the various mission agencies we partner with AND we will have a special guest with us, Vance Pittman, a former church planter in Las Vegas who now serves as the Vice President of the North American Mission Board – he'll be speaking to us about the importance of living on mission – it's going to be a GREAT Sunday that you do not want to miss.

And then, the following week, we are going to begin a four-week series, we're calling *IF* (**SHOW Series Promo slide**). It's based off the bible verse:

2 Chron. 7:14 – “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

This is going to be really appropriate as it will start two weeks before the Presidential election. I don't know of a better verse to talk about during this time of the year than this verse that calls us as God's people (a promise to Old Testament Israel and certainly a precept for us as his Church today) to humble ourselves before the Lord...to pray...to repent...and to ask for God's blessing and healing to be upon us – we'll start the *IF* series in two weeks.

Now, I have been looking forward since we started our series in Daniel to bringing this message today. It's a stand-alone message that flows out of what we learned in and through our study in the book of Daniel.

I'm calling it: **Lines in the Sand**

If you know your Texas history, in 1836, there was a lawyer and soldier by the name of William Barret “Buck” Travis that was fighting in what is known as “The Texas Revolt” or “Texas Revolution”.

He was a lieutenant colonel fighting for the Texas side, and he was holed up in what we know as the Alamo Mission. Travis is famous for writing a letter to the people of Texas and all the Americans in the World to come and help.

His letter that he sent out is better known as “The Victory or Death Letter” and here is why:

To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World:

Fellow citizens & compatriots—I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken—I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch—The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country—*Victory or Death.*

**William Barret Travis
Lt. Col. comdt.**

P. S. The Lord is on our side - When the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn - We have since found in deserted houses 80 or 90 bushels and got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves.

While this next part is debated it is believed the phrase “line in the sand” came when Travis speaking to the soldiers under his command – knowing that they would die, he drew a line in the sand, asking those willing to stay and fight to step across the line.

If you’ve ever been to the Alamo, it’s marked with a line and a plaque: **(SHOW IMAGE)**

It was a turning point...a decision had to be made...and once you crossed this line, there was no turning back. It’s a line in the sand.

It’s interesting to me as we studied the life of Daniel and his friends that there were several “lines in the sand” they drew while living in Babylon and serving in the king’s court.

When they were first exiled as teenagers, they were brainwashed in the Babylonian culture. They were forced to read the ancient Mesopotamia and Babylonia texts and study with the magicians and enchanters. As mentioned in the series, it is quite possible while serving in the king’s court under the supervision of chief eunuch, that they too were made eunuchs.

They went through a lot...from a mental standpoint...from an emotional standpoint...certainly from a spiritual standpoint.

They were forced to leave the city of God, where they had worshipped in the temple of their God, and now all of this pagan art and literature and lifestyle is being crammed down their throat and they seem to go along with it all UNTIL they are asked to eat and drink from the king’s table.

And do you remember what Daniel did?

Daniel 1:8 – “But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not defile himself.”

It was a line in the sand. Daniel resolved that THIS was a place he could NOT go as a follower of Yahweh living in Babylon and he “drew a line in the sand”.

We see another “line in the sand” being drawn in chapter three. Daniel is not mentioned, but his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are.

If you remember, King Nebuchadnezzar sets up an image 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. And he holds a dedication ceremony and word goes out that when the band starts to play that you better hit the deck and bow down and worship this image – and if you DON’T, then you will be thrown in the fiery furnace.

Now, Daniel’s friends are powerful people. In fact, Daniel chapter two ends with them being appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

So, these men are serving in the king. They are advancing his causes...doing his will...furthering whatever it is the king wants or demands BUT when called on to bow down to the image Nebo has constructed – they refused...it’s a line in the sand!

And Nebo is none too happy. We see their exchange in:

Daniel 3:15b-18 – “But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

There’s another “line in the sand” we read about in Daniel 6. Here, Daniel is around 80-85 years of age.

He is a man of prayer. He is a man of conviction. He has been serving various kings from the Babylonian and now Medo-Persian empire for seventy years of his life.

King Darius puts a decree out there that no one is allowed to pray or petition any other man or god except for worship King Darius for 30 days – if you break the law, you get fed to the lions.

And do you remember what Daniel did? It was seemingly “a line in the sand” for Daniel!

Daniel 6:10 – “When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his

knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.”

Lines in the sand! The question is, when do you draw these lines? As mentioned throughout this series, we are living in Babylon. And what we said is Babylon – whenever you see it in scripture it represents:

Babylon (lust for power, selfish autonomy, human greed, rampant idolatry, unbridled hedonism)

Living in this kind of world, where do we draw the line in the sand? How do we know when it's time? What issues or causes are those that make us as followers of Christ say, “Enough is enough? I'll go up to here...to this point, but on THIS...NOT going to do it...It's a line in the sand.”

I want to give you today what I hope is a helpful filter we can use so that we know better how to answer these questions.

Let me begin by giving you what I'm calling: **The Line in the Sand Filter**

Illus. Kitchen strainer – I see this kind of like this strainer here. As we go through life living in Babylon, we will have experiences, go through certain situations, have conversations that we will have to sift through and filter and we need something that will help us as we ask ourselves, is this a “line in the sand” for me as a believer.

The filtering system consists of four words that start with the letter “W”. These words are kind of like the (while it's hard to see from where you are), this filter is made up of a stainless-steel grid that helps the filtering process.

Here is the first “W” word that makes up the filter: **The Worship Grid**

When you look at the decisions that Daniel and his friends made as it relates to drawing a line in the sand, EVERY single time they drew a line in the sand it had to do with the issue of worship AND the next “w” we'll look at in just a moment...these first two “grids” FOR SURE go hand in hand.

When I say “the worship grid” what I mean by this is, where there is an issue of “bowing the knee” to anyone or anything other than God - that's a line in the sand.

Now, in Daniel's day and we see this in the New Testament and even in the far east today in places like India and Thailand and Indonesia where Hinduism and other eastern religions are practiced, the issue of “bowing the knee” and worshipping other gods is clearly seen and as followers of Christ, we know that we are not to bow down and worship any other God, than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said “we will NOT serve your gods or worship the image you have set up”. It was an issue of the heart for them – they were not going to give honor, praise or glory to any God, but Yahweh.

Where we have to be careful today is discerning (and I’m going to talk about discernment later in the message) – where we have to be careful is discerning if our hearts are bowing down to or worshipping other gods that may not be in “idol form” in the sense of little images made by human hands, but they are gods we worship nonetheless.

Remember from our *Unshakeable* series, we used Tim Keller’s definition of an idol. He wrote:

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you see to give you what only God can give...An idol is what you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.”...If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol.”

He went on to write...and I show you this because I am asking the Holy Spirit of the living God to show us today...to by his grace point out to us today where we may be bowing down and not even know it!

“A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving “face” and social standing. It can be romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in Christian ministry.”

See, we need discernment and we need the Spirit of God to reveal to us today if we are bowing down to any other God, than God himself. And if we are seeking as Keller suggest here from anything else what only God can give, it needs to be rooted out and repented of.

Only God is to be bowed down to! Only he is to be worshipped and served! Only he is to be honored...ONLY the Lord should have THAT place in our heart and life.

The first “W” in the grid that helps us filter knowing where and when we draw lines in the sand is the worship grid.

If something has our heart in the place of God, we make a clean break or at a very minimum we MUST make sure it’s in its proper place and NEVER overtakes the Lord for preeminence or significance in our life!

And I warn you in this, idols creep up! They are MORE subtle in our lives than we are aware and have a seducing power that we are SO GOOD at minimizing, justifying, and writing off as NOT that big of deal and all the while they are tangling up our heart causing us to bow down, worship and serve that which is not our God.

- Talk most about...
- Give (money and time) most to...
- Captures your thoughts the most...

Beware and if you are looking to where to draw lines in the sand, draw them around your heart and let no one and nothing have your heart but God.

The second “w” in our “Line in the Sand filter” is: **The Word Grid**

I mentioned that these first two go hand in hand. How did Daniel and his friends know we can go this far, but we will not go there. How did they know what was idolatry and what was not?

They knew the commands of God – i.e. they knew his Word! Daniel and all of his friends are given Babylonian names in place of their Jewish names.

ALL of their Jewish names reflect the God they serve:

- Daniel (changed to Belteshazzar) name means – “God is my Judge”
- Hananiah (changed Shadrach) name means – “Yahweh is gracious”
- Mishael (changed to Meshach) name means – “There is no one like God”
- Azariah (changed to Abednego) name means – “God is my helper”

Who gave them their name? Their parents. As you recall, their parents would have grown up during the days of King Josiah! He’s the one who repaired the Temple and ensured the Word of God was being read and obeyed.

Daniel and his friends were no doubt taught the commandments and the law of God. They knew the Word. As good Jewish boys, they would have prayed and recited the Shema repeatedly!

Deut. 6:6-9 – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (That’s the first “W – worship)”⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

What are these words? It's the law of God given to Moses. Every law Israel instituted branched off one of the 10 Commandments which by the way were given so that God's people could know him, know how to interact with him, know what he cared about and know how to treat one another in a way that honors him.

They would have had the commands of God – i.e. the Word of God written on their heart!

Every decision they were confronted with on the way to Babylon and while living in Babylon, I guarantee you filtered through the “Word” grid.

**Exodus 20:1-5a – “And God spoke all these words, saying,
2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 “You shall have no other gods before me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...”**

Where the Word speaks, God speaks! We know HOW to worship and WHO to worship by knowing his Word. Lines in the sand can be drawn, when we have the Word of God in our minds and hearts that we can readily draw upon!

THIS is why time alone with the Lord in his Word is so very important. It's the Word that is the main filter in determining where we draw lines in the sand!

So, when it comes to the issue of life...when we look at our culture and we ask, “What stance are we take in regards to the issue of abortion?” – that's a line in the sand for us because it's a line in the sand to God!

God's Word speaks to it. He is the author and giver of life. His word is clear regarding life and the taking of life.

What we call “Imago Dei” issues – what it means to be created in the image of God...when it comes to transgenderism or LGBTQI issues or the sexual ethics of the day, these issues God has spoken to.

These things aren't political, they are spiritual and where God speaks, they are lines in the sand for us.

We aren't going to bow the knee to culture and what culture says – our allegiance is to God.

Illus. Acts 5:29 – “We must obey God rather than men.”

And while I'm here...listen: The word speaks to a lot of different issues in life.

This means we don't have the right to pick and choose what scriptural issues we will draw a line in the sand on. Where God speaks, lines are drawn! So:

- Defending the rights of the poor – line in the sand.
- Taking care of the widow and orphan – line in the sand.
- Speaking up for the abused and those that experience injustice – line in the sand.
- Fighting for and maintaining doctrinal fidelity over the major doctrines of the Church – line in the sand.

Now, HOW we speak up, defend, take care, and fight for these issues in our time and day to a lost world – remember this is Babylon – HOW we speak up, defend, take care, and fight for these issues is in many ways just as important as WHAT we are speaking up, defending, taking care of and fighting for because there is a lost world watching our actions!

And this leads to the third “W” in our “Line in the Sand Filter” and that is what I’m calling: **The Witness Grid**

Daniel along with all of the Medo-Persian Empire was commanded NOT to pray or petition his God for thirty days. Now, he knew where this edict had come from...he wasn't stupid! He knew there were those in power that were:

- jealous of him...
- jealous of the position he held...
- jealous of the favor that he curried with seemingly every king that took the throne.

And he knew he was being watched. In fact, it was said of Daniel in:

Daniel 6:4-5 – “Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”

Daniel knew he was being watched...and when the edict was handed down, what did Daniel do?

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

Daniel drew a line in the sand and it revolved around his “witness”. Daniel could have gone up to his room and closed the windows and prayed and NO ONE would have ever seen him. He

could have said, you know these next thirty days, there is no reason to make a fuss over this, I'll just pray to myself.

But he didn't! And I think one of the main reasons he chose not to change his prayer life is because of his "witness". He KNEW he was being watched!

See, while Daniel while worked for the king...he served, worshipped, and watch this: he represented God in Babylon!

And you and me...we represent God in Babylon. We are his witnesses. And it's my hypothesis that CHOSE to draw a line in because he knew his "witness" that was at stake.

You and I will be confronted from time to time with choices or decisions before us that are not as clear as we'd like them to be sometimes. Right and wrong is not spelled out before us. It's not really a worship (bow the knee) thing.

And in these cases, it's helpful to funnel the decisions we make through the "Witness" grid.

We ask ourselves, "If I go here...or move in this direction...or make this decision, HOW does it reflect Christ?" NOT ONLY in the decision that we make but the attitude and spirit in which we make it!

Did you notice throughout the Daniel series whenever he drew a line in the sand, he was NEVER a jerk about it! Every single time, he had to draw a line in the sand, he did it with character and integrity and with a sense of respect to those who were lording over him.

He didn't make demands in the king's court about not eating from the king's table...he resolved that he wouldn't, but the scriptures says, "he asked the chief eunuch to allow him not to."

When God humbled Nebo and made him like a beast of the field, Daniel never once called him an idiot or was disrespectful. He spoke truth to power, but he always represented the Lord in a winsome, blameless, and respectful way.

In fact, he told Nebo he wished the interpretation was for someone else and NOT the king. He had a heart for the king, and it influenced how he drew lines in the sand.

Let's not ever forget that those who force us to draw lines in the sand...or cause us to draw lines in the sand...they are not our enemy – they are our mission field AND our heart should be to win them to Jesus as we make courageous and bold stances in his honor also knowing others are watching us as we draw these lines in the sand - we are witnesses of the Most High God!

Illus. Steven – Acts 7 – bold preaching, "Father, forgive them..." Paul standing watching!

When Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego refused to bow to the image Nebo constructed...they weren't screaming and hollering and making a scene. And when they were thrown into the fire and miraculously delivered, they didn't taunt the king...spike the ball in his face...NO! They

represented the true King and their actions in not just drawing a line in the sand...but also in HOW they drew a line in the sand.

We are to represent Christ and represent him well NOT just in the truth we fight for, but in how we treat people while drawing lines in the sand. This is the “Witness grid”.

We come the fourth “W” in the “Line in the Sand Filter” and that is: **The Wisdom Grid**

What do you do when there is a decision to make and it’s not clear regarding our worship...it’s not spelled out in the word...it’s not a witness issue necessarily. What do you do then?

Well, that’s when wisdom must prevail. We are told in scripture to ask for wisdom.

James 1:5 – “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

Read the Proverbs – it’s a book of wisdom and we are encouraged to get it at all costs!

Wisdom is taking the knowledge you have from study and life and using it for good judgment. and we need God’s wisdom on when and how to draw lines in the sand ESPECIALLY in those times when it’s not so clear what you should do...when it’s NOT a glaringly obvious worship, word, or witness issue.

Let me very quickly give you some guidelines in this that I think will help you as you filter choices and decisions through the “Wisdom Grid”.

1. Give grace

When it comes to the wisdom grid, what may end up being a line in the sand for you, may not be for someone else – VERY important!

What you have to make sure is that you don’t sin against your conscious.

In the New Testament, it was an issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols. For some believers, it was no issue at all but for others it was a true stumbling block! And so, Paul writes in 1 Cor. 8 and says if you are together, don’t eat the meat and cause a brother with a weaker conscience to stumble!

Now, if you’re the brother with the weaker conscience, it doesn’t mean the brother or sister that doesn’t have a problem eating the meat offered to idols is sinning against God when they eat, and you should give grace!

In other words, don’t hold people to the exact same lines in the sand as you when it’s NOT worship, word, and witness clear. We need God’s wisdom and we need to give grace.

2. Have faith

In Romans 14, Paul is dealing with this issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols...same as 1 Cor. 8. And he writes these words to the believers in Rome.

Romans 14:23 – “But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

If there is a question about drawing a line in the sand and you don't know what to do, go in the direction that faith takes you.

- If it's a fear of man driving the decision – that's not the direction you want to go.
- If it's a fear of consequences – that's not the direction you want to go.
- If it's a fear of being judged or ridiculed by others or of the cost of making the decision – that's not of faith!

Go in the direction that faith leads. This is so important in terms of what we'd call the “grey issues” of life. Faith is the direction you want to go because faith is what God will honor. Third and finally:

3. Show love

Let love for God and love for others be your deepest motivation for drawing lines in the sand.

In our world today...in Babylon, there is no question that our stances will be misinterpreted and misconstrued. When we draw lines in the sand, sometimes it doesn't matter what our attitude will be because we stand for truth, we'll be labeled and mistreated.

In all of this, show love – that's truly reflecting Christ and let the chips (so to speak) fall where they may.

We are NOT responsible for what happens to us or how we are treated when lines in the sand are drawn, we are only responsible for being obedient to God in the best way we know how and when we give grace, and have faith, and show love, we can be confident we're walking in the wisdom of God.

James 3:17 – “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

I can't tell you outside of the worship and word grid where you should draw lines. I do know that you will have to make these decisions though.

- Your HR dept sends out an email and it's pride month, they want you to be a part of the corporate celebration – what will you do?

- You have your child in select sports and it will cause them and you to miss the gathering of the church for weeks at a time – what will you do?
- You're called on to go to an event for your job that supports the anthesis of all that you believe. You're expected to go – what will you do?
- Students, your teacher gives an assignment that you know you can't write without your faith coming through on the page, but you also know your teacher is hostile to your beliefs and a grade is at stake – what will you do?
- You have a family member or friend that is in in a gay lifestyle and you get invited to go or to participate in their wedding – what will you do?

Use “The Line in the Sand” filter and seek the Lord with your whole heart. And he will help you to make right decisions and be with you every step of the way. Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.