

## I. Set Up

A. Find someone you don't know and let them know something important about yourself, like Cubs or White Sox or your favorite Ben and Jerry's flavor.

B. Welcome / Introduction / Special Welcome to Guests – WE ARE NOT ASKING THEM TO FILL OUT CARDS THIS WEEK.

C. Today we begin a new series. It's called FutureYou. We are exploring the question: what would it look like to live well in the future – to thrive and be a force for the common good? Of course this begs the question: What will the future be like.

1. Mike wrote a book charting some of the major trends – which he called glaciers.

2. Of course he is hardly the first to make projections about the future. Back in the 1960s we were told that by now:

a) If your spouse was in a bad mood you'd be able to pop down to the corner drugstore, buy some anti-grouch pills, and slip them into their coffee. Tragically, we are still waiting for those pills!

b) We were told that by now, genetic engineering would have led to square tomatoes, because these could be more easily packed and they would fit on sandwiches better.

c) And television would be smellavision – we'd be able to smell whatever was on the screen, which would be “a feature whose desirability would vary greatly depending on exactly what it is you're watching.”

D. Mike will be headed in a slightly different direction today. We are done with the speculation. We will be in the Book of Daniel looking for insight on how we live better going forward. Right now...

## II. Introduction

A. A few weeks ago, Amazon issued a press release noting that the most highlighted passage out of any book read on Kindle – highlighted twice as often as any other passage in any book – was from the second volume of *The Hunger Games*. The line was, “Because sometimes things happen to people and they're not equipped to deal with them.”<sup>1</sup>

B. I highlighted this passage about passages being highlighted, aware of the irony – but mostly creped out to learn that Jeff Bezos was keeping track of what I underline – because this series is designed to help us be equipped to deal with the things that happen.

C. The future is the subject of endless fascination and lots of speculation – much of which turns out to be wrong. So let me be clear: the goal of this series is not to predict what is coming our way, but to help us be ready to live well. What we want to learn is how to thrive in the future and to help others do the same. To that end, over the next six weeks we will be looking backwards in order to look ahead.

D. Thanks for being here. I realize that some of you are breaking normal Sunday morning routines today. As a rule, the most spiritual thing you've done in the last ten years is shop at Whole Foods. Others of you have been out for a while. Welcome back.

E. Every fall we do a series that is designed to make it as easy as possible for people to take a step closer to God.

1. For some of you that means showing up for a worship service or meeting at someone's house to discuss a book or a sermon or a passage from the Bible.
2. For others it means signing up to tutor kids in North Chicago or volunteering to help the homeless by working with PADS, or caring for the under resourced by staffing the Justice Center or getting involved in a dozen of other ways.
3. For others it may be meeting someone to pray or to talk about what's going on in your life. We offer Spiritual Checkups – a chance for you to sit with one of the pastors and talk about how things are going.

F. We want to help. We believe you moving back to God is one of those things where everyone wins, starting with you. But it's not something someone else can do for you. We want to make it as easy as we can, but this is on you.

G. Many of you read the book I wrote about the future. In it:

1. I argue that although change is constant, sometimes the magnitude of change is greater than others. And I think the next twenty years will be one of those times. I think that we are heading into lots of change – some good and some not so much. Then I map out a few of the reasons I think this. And a few of the ways I think it will play out.
2. Books that try to predict the future are full of flaws. Mine is no different. Maybe worse – only time will tell. But I think it's prudent to look ahead and prepare, both for tomorrow and for eternity.

H. I also think that one of the ways we can look ahead is to look back, which is not an idea new with me. Winston Churchill, Peter Drucker and others said as much.<sup>2</sup>

III. In our case, we are going to be looking back to events that took place about three thousand years ago and which are described in the Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament. To be more specific, in the book of Daniel.

A. There are a variety of ways to describe the Bible: it is a collection of 66 books, 39 in the first half – the Old Testament, the left side, and 27 in the New Testament: it's a book that was written over 1,600 years and by forty different authors from three continents and in three languages; it's a book that weighs in on the biggest and most important issues in front of us. It tells us who we are and how to live and what is expected of us; it is a book in which God reveals himself.

B. Many think that it's a collection of religious advice and rules, inspirational stories and morality lessons. It's not. It's far more accurate to say that it is a story – and that the story is about God's love for us, for you.

1. Like any good story, there is tension. When the Old Testament opens everything is great... for about four pages. Then sin, evil and rebellion enter the world and all kinds of things go wrong. In fact, it quickly becomes obvious that things are so bad that we cannot fix them. But then – in Genesis 3 – we find a passage that sets the stage for everything that follows. It's one we have to understand if we are going to understand what is happening. (The Bible is a bit like a movie where, if you miss the first few minutes, you're lost. You are going to misunderstand the big point).

2. In Genesis three we are told that God will send help – someone to fix things, defeat evil and rescue us. It also spends some time setting up what person will be like. Which means that, if we are paying attention we read the rest of the Old Testament waiting for that person to show up.

C. In Genesis 12 he offers Abraham a deal and from that point on the Old Testament is about his decedents – the Jews – through whom the rescuer will arrive.

D. We keep turning the page wondering when the hero is going to arrive. As we are doing so Abraham and his family grow from a family to a tribe to a small nation to a super power – and then, just when it looks like the promises are true, they crash.

1. The Jews reach their zenith under David and Solomon around 1000 BC and then the country collapses. Most of the Jews – 10 of the 12 tribes – are overrun by the Assyrians. The remaining two are taken over by the Babylonians and marched into captivity in Babylon.

2. And this is where we are looking. Babylon is bad. Evil. Powerful and ruthless. They defeat Jerusalem, sack the Temple and then march all of the people 500 miles through the desert to Babylon – their capitol - and force them to serve as slaves.
- E. Four of the young boys they capture – Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the best and brightest – are enrolled in an “internship” in the palace, where they are trained to help the Babylonians rule over the Jews.<sup>3</sup>
1. These boys are very young – probably around 13 or 14.<sup>4</sup> And they are educated so that they can serve as liaisons back with their people.
  2. I saw this on a trip to Kenya. Back in the 70s the Kenya government had some challenges with the Maasai tribe. They are the Africans you often see in brightly colored robes who jump.
  3. The Maasai believe that God gave them all of the cattle in the world. So, if you are not a Maasai and you have a cow, they come at night to take it back. And at the time they were semi-nomadic and didn’t necessarily respect property rights. Let’s say, their cultural practices were clashing with everyone else. So the Kenyan government took one young boy from each Maasai village and brought them into the city to be educated. And they had them go home every month or so to stay in touch with their people and culture. But they eventually served as the interpreters between the Kenyan government and the Maasai – not of the language but of life. They understood both groups. That is what is going on here.
- F. But understand, this is a very tough assignment.
1. These boys are young. They had previously lived pretty pampered lives in the palace of Jerusalem.
  2. Babylon – their new home – is more powerful and advanced than Israel had been. For starters, it was a military machine. The Babylonian army was larger and stronger, and the capital was more secure. There are two walls surrounding it. One is 17 miles long and wide enough for two chariots to ride side by side. The other – the inner wall – was 150 feet thick in some spots. And yet it was also beautiful – the hanging gardens in the city were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
  3. These young boys are not high school exchange students with Rotary. They are prisoners being indoctrinated. Their names are taken from them and in their place they are given degrading Babylonian nicknames.<sup>5</sup> “Your name was Mike. We’ll call you ‘idiot’ from now on.”
  4. From a passage in Josephus it appears likely that they were turned into eunuchs.

5. The goal of the Babylonians is to break them – to strip them of their identity and faith.

6. And yet, these boys thrive. They remain true to their deepest convictions. They remain who they are and emerge as men of exceptional courage and thoughtfulness.<sup>6</sup>

G. They navigate a changing culture very well. The question is, how? And what can we learn from them? The place we’re going to be looking is the first half dozen chapters of the Book of Daniel.

IV. There are a couple things to note here.

A. It would be great for you to get a Bible and read the first six chapters. It will pull you along. In fact, it reads like an action movie. Lots of action and adventure. Daniel’s friends get thrown into a furnace; Daniel is lowered into a den of lions. There is more political intrigue than you find in Chicago politics.

B. This is real history. The Bible is never “once upon a time in a faraway land.” The story it tells is real and it is supported by the writings of ancient historians and also by ongoing archeological research. In fact, we filmed the set ups for the small group discussions at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago because they have many artifacts from Babylon.

V. So let me offer five reasons why you should be a part of this.

A. Point One: It’s important to look ahead

1. As I argue in *FutureView* – the world is always changing. But the pace of change has been accelerating and I think the pace is going to pick up.

2. Some of what is coming our way will be good and some not so much. Trying to move as fast as technology is not a viable long-term strategy. We need to be more thoughtful. Looking ahead has always been a good idea. I think it is becoming a survival skill.

3. I am not advocating looking ahead to satisfy our curiosity about tomorrow. I am arguing that we look ahead in order: to be better prepared to navigate the “waves of change” headed our way;<sup>7</sup> and to be the kind of people who help others survive and thrive.

4. Look, in some ways, the future is not the future, it’s the present. What you think is going to happen tomorrow shapes how you live today. It is prudent to give it some serious thought.

B. Point Two: We are not looking ahead very well right now

1. Some people are. Some political theorists and venture capitalists seem to be pretty astute at this. There are a few science fiction writers who have gotten a lot right about the future.<sup>8</sup>

a) This week marks the fiftieth anniversary of Star Trek, so I read some articles about how many things Gene Roddenberry got right.

b) Earlier, in my preparation for the lecture I did on “The Thirty Changes Not Mentioned in the Book,” I ran across some a number of fairly serious efforts to show how many things the Jetsons TV show got right.

2. There are some people looking ahead pretty effectively.<sup>9</sup> But on the whole, we tend to be pretty short sighted. We focus on: deadlines for today and tomorrow. You are considered a visionary if you look past quarterly profits. There are not a lot of people thinking about the next fifty years or about the next 500. And as a pastor I have always been frustrated at how little thought people give to eternity. Because I believe that eternity changes everything. The fact that we live after we die really should profoundly influence how we live.

3. The proof of how little thought goes into tomorrow is on display every time we look at things like our national debt or on how little money people have saved for retirement.<sup>10</sup>

a) Forty-three percent of Americans have no money saved for retirement. When you average the amount that has been saved for retirement, it’s about five thousand per couple. When you focus on those in their late 50s and early 60s, it’s \$17K, but forty percent of those in their late 50s and early 60s have not saved anything.<sup>11</sup>

b) There are other ways to make this point, but let’s just say: as a rule, we do not spend a lot of time looking ahead.

C. Point Three: We can be better prepared.

1. In I Chronicles 12 there is an important statement that is easy to overlook. Like Daniel, First Chronicles is a book found in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, the left side of The Book. Neither 1 Chronicles, nor its sequel, 2 Chronicles, provide any new information – the stories they tell are told in other places in the Old Testament. But they summarize a lot and in doing so they give the big picture.

2. I Chronicles opens with nine chapters of genealogy – which is always popular and riveting. And then it moves to an account of David and Solomon. In I Chronicles 12 there is reference to the tribe of Issachar. It’s not a good moment for Israel. Just before we read I Chronicles 12, we learn that:

- a) The Jews are on the run, fleeing from the Philistines.
  - b) Saul, their King, has just committed suicide. In fact, his head is on display in the Philistine temple of Dagon.
  - c) The fleeing Jewish army has abandoned a number of towns to their enemies.
3. It's a bad day. But it's the point where everything turns. A gathering is held in Hebron so that the country can regroup. This is where David is anointed King.<sup>12</sup>
  4. One of the things the author of Chronicles includes is the list of people who sign on with him that day, transforming his army from a rag tag group of distressed malcontents to a massive, well-resourced army.
  5. And among those signing on were “the men of Issachar” who, according to Ezra, the author of 1 Chronicles, “understood the times and who knew what Israel should do.” These were strategists. These were people who learned how to look ahead and think about what was in the pipeline.
  6. The Hebrew word that is used to describe them is *binah*, which suggests that they had insight, intelligence, wisdom, and cunning. They were shrewd.
  7. We can learn some of this. We cannot predict specific events. But we can look at the trends and project ahead and think about what to do now in order to do well then.
  8. Max Dupree – the legendary CEO of Herman Miller and the author of *Leadership is an Art* and *Leadership Jazz* – famously stated that “the first job of a leader is to define reality.” The men of Issachar helped David do that, and they did that by looking ahead.
  9. By thinking about the future – and by studying the past to see how others thrived in times of disruption – we can more successfully navigate some of the changes coming our way.
  10. So: point one - it's prudent to look ahead; point two - we do not do this very well; point three - it can be done. We can shine our headlights further ahead and prepare.
- D. Point Four: Now is a good time to be looking ahead.
1. All you need to do is skim the headlines, open your AOL account or check your Twitter feed to know that lots of things are going on: ISIS is inspiring terrorism around the globe; North Korea is advancing its nuclear weapons capabilities; Europe is fracturing; this summer we had a series of violent episodes in our own country – many involving the police.

2. As is often the case, people are saying things like: this is the craziest time ever; this is the most important election ever; more is changing now than ever. I don't think those things are necessarily true. But it does seem like a good time to step back and get some perspective. Remind ourselves of the bigger, more important issues in play.

E. Five: Now is a good time to seek God's counsel.

1. Full disclosure here: I believe the future rests in God's hands; I believe that He loves you and wants to be a bigger part of your life; I believe that the Bible is a divinely inspired book – full of unique and timeless insight; I believe you have an opportunity and a responsibility to move towards God.

2. In this series we are going to be looking at this Book to figure out how to live well now so we are better positioned for tomorrow.

3. We are going to be looking at the decisions Daniel and his friends made in order to develop the character and God-consciousness that allows them to navigate a world of chaos and change. The topics we will be covering will include: courage, wisdom, faith, obedience, friendships and more.

VI. So here is the challenge – jump in. If you have the card take that out for a moment. I am asking you to jump in. That means a few things.

A. Sign up today. Fill out this card and let us know you're in.

B. Show up next weekend. This is as a six-week challenge. Last year there was the ALS challenge where you had to dump ice water on your head. This is much easier than that! No ice water. But you do need to take some steps. Show up next week – and for the five weeks after that. This is a six week challenge in part because that is how long it takes to really move in this direction. Stick six is the catch phrase we are using for this. It takes six weeks.

C. Read the daily devotions that explore the same topic as the sermon but from a different angle. If you sign up they are sent to you every morning via an email. They take about five minutes to read. Think of them as a thought for the day.

D. Join a discussion group. If you read *FutureView* you know that I think these are key. We have created some videos for these groups and also questions to help you unpack these. There are over 100 small groups out there. Many have room for new people to sign up. We also have open groups meeting at each of the three campuses that are led by a staff member.

VII. Look, some of you haven't taken a spiritual risk in thirty years.

A. Some of you haven't taken a thoughtful look at the Bible since a bad Sunday School experience fifty years ago. Some of you are remarkably bright and capable in every area of your life – except this. You are a hard charger at work, you are in great shape, you are on an upward trajectory. But you are a spiritual lightweight and that is starting to bother you. This series is designed for you.

B. Let me be clear, I am not promising you three easy answers or a life. I am not suggesting the way forward is simple. But we are going to unpack some of the bigger issues around the way forward.

VIII. Let me end with two stories.

A. A couple weeks ago I ended up in a conversation with a man. I'd never talked to him before, but he came up to me and said, "I read your book. You think we're heading for some really bad times, don't you. You didn't completely connect the dots. You spent all of this time doing all of this research and you seemed to imply that things are going to get hard. But you don't say that. You sort of pulled your punches. You think things are going to get hard don't you?"

1. I said, "Look. I said as much as I thought I could say. I don't know if things are going to get hard for everyone or not. They are hard for lots of people right now. In the short term I don't know where the economy is headed. I don't know if any of the Monsters Under the Bed are going to crawl out. Some people think the sky is falling. Others are pretty optimistic. I'm not a futurist. I turned in my book report on what "they" are saying. It's mixed.

2. But he said, "I get that. But really you think it's going to get bad. Right?" We went back and forth like this for a bit and then I finally said, "I do know this. Things are going to get hard for you. Eventually. If we live long enough we all get knocked down. You will get knocked down."

3. He looked pretty horrified. And I said, "you don't have to live in fear of that." Which led to into a different conversation. And which also sets up the second story.

B. This past week, Dan Syvertsen, the campus pastor at Highland Park, went over to The Botanical Gardens on Wednesday morning to pray for the weekend.

1. Dan and Kelly have been inviting people. As have others. And on Wednesday he went to pray for those he was inviting – and all those being invited to the Highland Park campus.

2. He said that he went out onto a deck, walked over to the far corner, turned his chair into the corner and started to pray. After about 15 minutes, a guy sat down about a foot away from him, facing him. Dan said, “I wasn’t going to let this slow me down. I kept praying.” But then the guy says, “Sorry for invading your space. But I’ve sat here every nice day for five years.”

3. So Dan says, “We’ll I’m sorry for invading your space.” And moves about six feet away, and at this point he is ready to move on. But then the man says, “I come here to read.” So Dan asks him, “Really. And what do you read?”

4. “I read books about the future.” At this point, Dan said it started to feel like maybe God was trying to get his attention. They ended up in a forty-five minute conversation about the future, Dan told him about this series and invited him to come to church. And went back the next day and gave him a copy of the book. So, who knows, he may be listening. Anyway, at some point he said that he was not a religious person but he envied those that had faith that God had everything under control.

IX. I’ve heard a bit of that in the last few weeks. A combination of concern about the future and a disbelief that God has things under control – which combine to lead to some significant angst.

A. I am here to say, God is there, He loves you and there is a way forward that includes a sense of great peace and assurance. But you have to lean in. I believe you owe it to yourself to pursue the God who is pursuing you. I want to encourage you to sign up and jump in.

B. Next week we look at courage and fear.

1. How do we face such an uncertain future and keep our wits about us? What did Daniel and his three comrades do in the face of some real scary stuff?

C. Some of you live with some significant dis-ease. We are going to look directly at that. Come back and bring your friends.

D. That is next week. Right now, I am going to close in prayer and then we are going to give you another sixty seconds after that to fill out the cards.

E. And by the way, you can use the back of the card to send us a note, ask questions, share a prayer request, whatever.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Shiffman, “Majoring in Fear,” *First Things*, p. 19.

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<sup>2</sup> The thought is, the further ahead you want to look, the further back you need to study.

<sup>3</sup> They had grown up in privilege. Josephus tells us that Daniel and his friends were from the family of Zedekiah and that their grandfather was Josiah – this means they had royal blood. And both OT and other sources note that Jehoiakim was on the throne at the time they were in Jerusalem and he had a reputation of having a lavish palace. He put a lot of money into architecture and wanted to live like an oriental monarch.

<sup>4</sup> The kings wanted impressionable people, not those whose identity was already formed.

<sup>5</sup> When you look at the meaning of their Babylonian names you can see that they are being mocked.. 1) Daniel, whose name means “God is judge,” is renamed Beltshazzar, which means “Bel will protect the hostages of the king.” (Bel was the head of the Babylonian pantheon). This name was selected to change Daniel’s allegiance. 2) Hananiah – whose name means “God is gracious” was renamed Shadrach, which means “Sin (the moon god) will be your protector: 3) Mishael, whose name in Hebrew means, “Who is like God?” Is renamed Meshach, which means, “Who is this?” You can picture this 12 year old standing in front of them, and they say, “What is your name?” And he pulls himself up to his full height – he says, “I am like God.” And they laugh and say, “We’re going to call you, ‘You are like what?’” 4) Azariah’s name means “Yahweh helps.”<sup>5</sup> He is renamed Obed-nego, which means “Nego helps.” Nego (or Nebo) was another of the gods. Nebuchadnezzar took his own name from Nebo. Nebuchadnezzar means, “Nebo will protect the crown.” Azariah’s name is their way or reminding him that he now has another protector. It’s clear that this renaming is an attempt to obliterate the cultural background of these little boys – to force them to think like Babylonians.

<sup>6</sup> John Lennox, an Oxford mathematician, writes: “What makes the story of their faith remarkable is that they did not simply continue the private devotion to God that they had developed in their homeland; they maintained a high-profile public witness in a pluralistic society that became increasingly antagonistic to their faith. That is why their story has such a powerful message for us today. Strong currents of pluralism and secularism in contemporary Western society, reinforced by a paralyzing political correctness, increasingly push expression of faith in God to the margins, confining it if possible to the private sphere.” (John C. Lennox, *Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism* (Monarch Books, 2015), p. 1.) Daniel is an exceptional guy. One of the things I like about the Bible is that it tells a pretty accurate story about the human condition. Lots of people try hard but make a mess of things.

<sup>7</sup> This past summer Alvin Toffler passed away. In 1970 he emerged as a leading futurists. His big contribution was to weigh in on the intersection of technology and how change would impact the human heart. His concern was the “shattering stress and disorientation” that humans would experience when subjected to “too much change in too short a time.” He called it future shock.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, they tend to do better than scientists when it comes to looking out more than a few years.

<sup>9</sup> There is a management theorist named Elliot Jacques – who argues that we come wired with a time horizon and part of what makes a Thomas Jefferson or a Winston Churchill so important is that they naturally think about the next 200 years, as opposed to most people who do not think much beyond their next meal. But even he argued that we can learn to look further out. In his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman wrote, “What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be not one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture...”

<sup>10</sup> Back in the 50s, 60s and 70s a number of government and non-governmental groups focused on looking and planning ahead. There were big research institutes like RAND and SRI that explored forecasting. But those groups are not as well funded today and a lot of what is being written about the future is trendy and is

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written by people with names like Faith Popcorn. // In a recent article about Toffler that came out when he died the writer noted that Toffler was largely right in his predictions but few were following his lead. In fact, the writer said that today our problem is less future shock than future blindness.

<sup>11</sup> Rex Nutting, “The typical American couple has only \$5,000 saved for retirement,” *MarketWatch*, June 15, 2016 9:12 a.m. ET

<sup>12</sup> At this moment, David is appointed King over 11 of the 12 tribes.