

MAKE IT **COUNT**

A 10-week study for leadership teams by *Influence* magazine



# Leading in Culturally Divided Times

By STEPHEN BLANDINO

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

MAKE IT COUNT

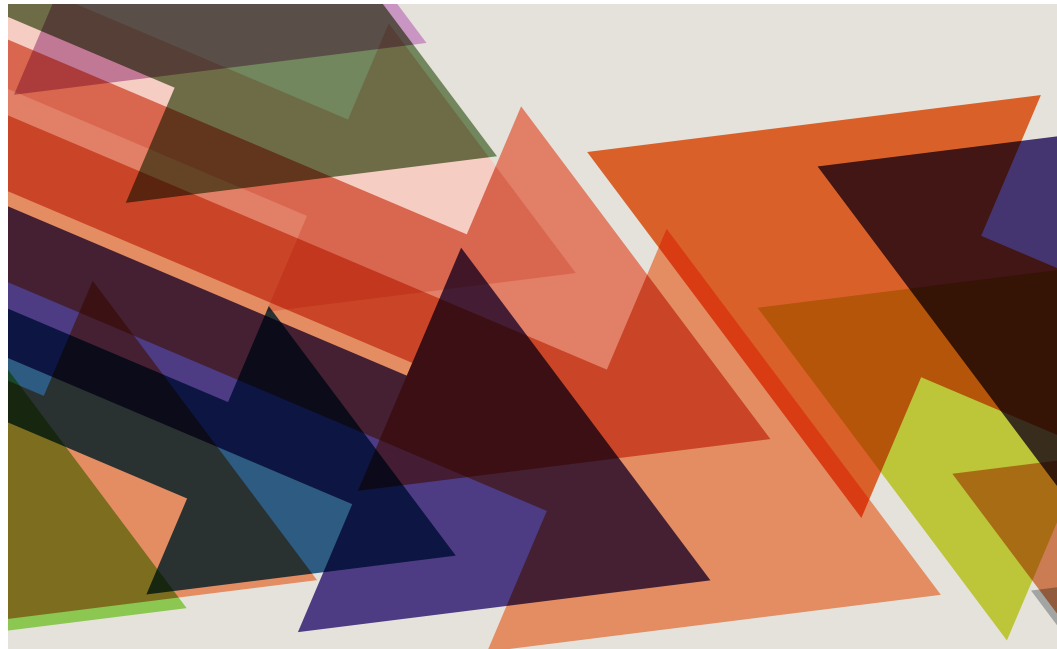
A 10-Week Study  
For Leadership  
Teams

## What Is Make It Count?

**M**ake It Count is a leadership development resource for use individually or with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Each installment is also available online as a downloadable PDF, along with interactive pages for group member use. The underlined words and phrases in the following text correspond to fill-in-the-blank sections on team member pages. Access these free resources at [influencemagazine.com/Downloads](http://influencemagazine.com/Downloads).

These lessons are written by **STEPHEN BLANDINO**, lead pastor of 7 City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and the author of several books.



# Leading in Culturally Divided Times

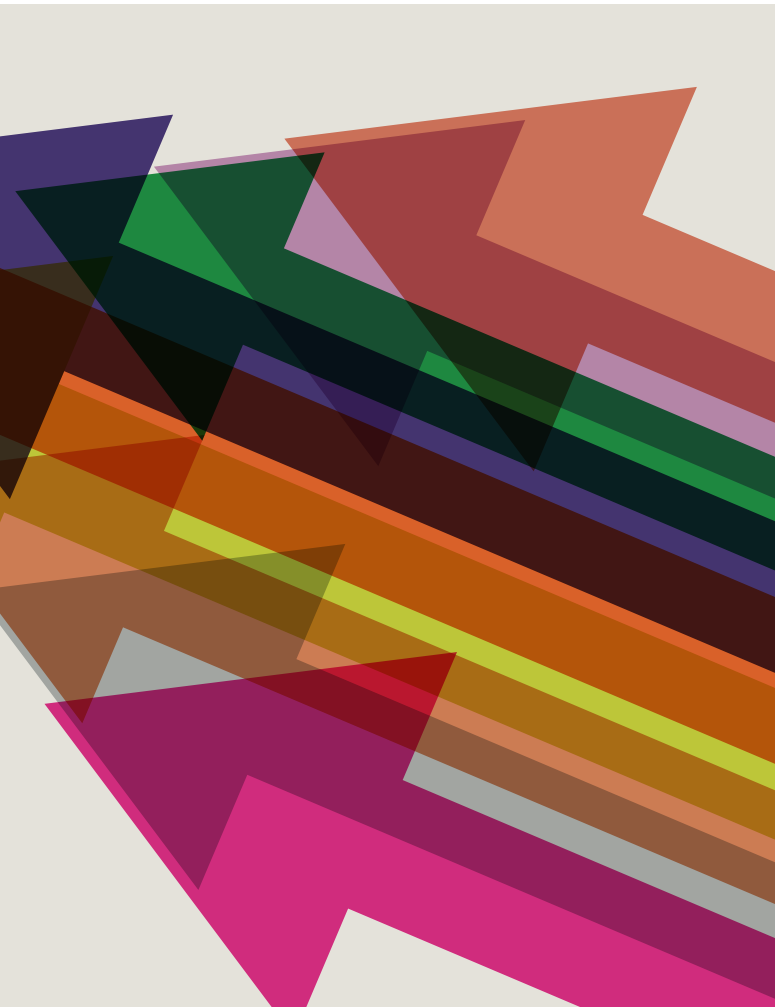
By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**

**D**aniel was among the exiles taken from Jerusalem to Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. As strangers in a foreign land, Daniel and his friends learned to navigate significant cultural differences without compromising their faith.

Similarly, Christians in America live in culturally divided times. Biblical values and beliefs are increasingly at odds with prevailing cultural views. Nevertheless, like the Early Christians who made their marks as “foreigners and exiles,” we are called to “live such good lives” others will take note and “glorify God” (1 Peter 2:11–12).

The Jewish exiles hoped to return to their homeland quickly, but the prophet Jeremiah announced they would be in Babylon for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10).

God’s instructions to the Jewish people were clear: Build houses, settle down, and raise families (Jeremiah 29:4–6). Additionally, Jeremiah 29:7 says, “Seek the



peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

That’s the approach Daniel took. Rather than retaliating against the Babylonian culture, he faithfully led for more than six decades under four different kings — Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus. But Daniel did so with an uncommon set of qualities.

In fact, Daniel 6:3 says, “Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.”

The traits that made Daniel stand out from the crowd should distinguish Christians as well. Consider the following 10:

1. **Commitment.** Despite living and leading in a pagan culture, Daniel modeled an unwavering commitment to God.
2. **Prayer.** Daniel was a person of prayer. Even when the pressure was on to compromise his faith, Daniel still prayed three times daily.
3. **Teachability.** Daniel was a student of Babylonian culture, spending three years learning the literature and language. That understanding enabled Daniel to lead with a clear understanding of his context.
4. **Self-control.** Doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong requires self-control. Daniel mastered both aspects of self-control, practicing restraint and proficiency in his life and leadership.
5. **Competence.** While serving under King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel became known for his exceptional competence. His abilities came from God, but Daniel was also faithful to develop them.
6. **Character.** Daniel modeled character, resisting the temptations of convenience, carrots, and corruption under various kings. Daniel’s character helped him remain faithful to God and gave him the moral authority to lead.
7. **Humility.** Daniel didn’t let his ego dominate his leadership. He led with humility, giving credit to God and showing respect to the kings.
8. **Wisdom.** Daniel’s wisdom reveals the importance of responding to culture with restraint, grace, clarity, solutions, and a commitment to seek God. His life offers a powerful example for today.
9. **Courage.** Daniel was courageous, standing up for what he knew was right and speaking truth to power. Courage is a trait that makes the others possible.
10. **Consistency.** Daniel didn’t just practice these distinguishing qualities occasionally. He consistently modeled them for more than 65 years, which led to increasing influence.

As you read, reflect, and discuss these traits, let them become a roadmap for leading through culturally divided times.

# 1 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Commitment

### Assess

How does our relationship with God impact our ability to lead in culturally divided times?

### Insights and Ideas

**D**aniel was about 16 when he became an exile to Babylon, where he and his fellow Jews would remain in captivity for 70 years.

Despite his situation, Daniel took to heart the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7).

Daniel didn’t just sit around complaining about his circumstances. In fact, Daniel 6:3 says, “Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.”

In other words, Daniel lived and led in such a way others could not ignore the exceptional nature of his life.

What was the hallmark of Daniel’s life? His commitment to God.

Daniel found a way to lead in Babylon while remaining faithful to the Lord. Centuries before Jesus prayed His disciples would be *in* the world but not *of* it (John 17:11–19), Daniel was demonstrating that kind of lifestyle.

For more than 65 years, Daniel remained committed to God while serving under four kings: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus.

In today’s American culture, politicians, platforms, and parties often distract and divide. Many pastors have become followers and promoters of worldly leaders and earthly kings. However, our allegiance belongs to only one King — the Lord Jesus Christ.

You cannot lead spiritual change by following cultural leaders. Daniel understood this. Consider what the administrators and satraps under King Darius said about Daniel: “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God” (Daniel 6:5).

Daniel’s compass for life and leadership was his commitment to the Lord. The same must be true for us. If our allegiance becomes sidetracked by kings or worldly leaders, we’ve sold our faith to a lesser god.

The apostle Paul said, “Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20–21).

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How are some Christian leaders today compromising their faith with allegiance to earthly kings?
2. What are some practical ways Daniel showed commitment to the Lord?
3. How does Daniel’s leadership inspire you to remain focused on God alone?

### Apply

Is our culture shaping you and your devotion to Christ in any way? If so, what do you need to fully submit to Christ?

# 1 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Commitment

Daniel was about 16 when he became an exile to Babylon, where he and his fellow Jews would remain in captivity for 70 years.

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7).

“Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom” (Daniel 6:3).

What was the hallmark of Daniel’s life? His \_\_\_\_\_ to God.  
Daniel found a way to lead in Babylon while remaining faithful to the Lord.

You cannot lead spiritual change by \_\_\_\_\_ cultural leaders.

“We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God” (Daniel 6:5).

Daniel’s \_\_\_\_\_ for life and leadership was his commitment to the Lord. The same must be true for us.

“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20–21).

### Apply

Is our culture shaping you and your devotion to Christ in any way? If so, what do you need to fully submit to Christ?

## 2 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Prayer

### Team Review

How are you deepening your commitment to Christ in the face of cultural headwinds?

### Assess

What role does prayer play in leading during culturally divided times?

### Insights and Ideas

Author Bob Sorge once noted, “Prayerlessness is the first sign of prideful independence.” Without prayer, we’re saying to God, “I don’t need your help. I’ve got this covered without you.”

That mindset won’t get you far. You need God’s help, and prayer is the doorway to receiving it.

Prayer was another distinguishing quality in Daniel’s life and leadership. What role does prayer play when leading amid cultural complexities? Consider two truths:

1. *Prayer calibrates the soul.* Culture often nudges us toward subtle compromises. Prayer helps counteract this.

Sorge says, “Prayer is the constant calibration of the soul. It is a lifestyle of stopping and taking candid spiritual inventory.”

Seeking God through prayer keeps our hearts surrendered to Him and our ears tuned to His voice. Through prayer, we build fortitude for being *in* the world but not of it.

Spending time in God’s presence and listening to His voice makes us less susceptible to believing cultural lies.

2. *Prayer shapes the situation.* Assemblies of God Pastor Jeff Leake observed, “Our prayers release God’s will into our world.” The starting place for change isn’t the activity of *doing*, but the activity of *praying*. Prayer does what no other human action can do.

Daniel certainly recognized the power of prayer. When King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to execute his officials for their inability to reveal his dream and its meaning, Daniel urged his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to “plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2:18).

God indeed revealed the mystery, and Daniel’s life was spared. Where did the miracle begin? With prayer. Praying turned around an otherwise impossible situation.

Through prayer, we’re expressing faith in God’s ability to intervene rather than relying solely on our own power.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How has prayer changed your circumstances?
2. Can you name a specific situation in society that calls for prayer?
3. How can you be more intentional about applying prayer to the challenges of leading in culturally divided times?

### Apply

Spend time praying for the people in our culture with whom you most disagree. Rather than praying with anger and exasperation, ask God to break your heart for them, grow your compassion, and draw them to Jesus.

## 2 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Prayer

“Prayerlessness is the first sign of prideful independence.” — Bob Sorge

Prayer was another distinguishing quality in Daniel’s life and leadership.

1. *Prayer* \_\_\_\_\_ *the soul.*

“Prayer is the constant calibration of the soul. It is a lifestyle of stopping and taking candid spiritual inventory.” — Bob Sorge

Seeking God through prayer keeps our hearts surrendered to Him and our ears tuned to His voice. Through prayer, we build fortitude for being *in* the world but not *of* it.

2. *Prayer* \_\_\_\_\_ *the situation.*

“Our prayers release God’s will into our world.” — Jeff Leake

The starting place for change isn’t the activity of *doing*, but the activity of *praying*. Prayer does what no other human action can do.

When King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to execute his officials for their inability to reveal his dream and its meaning, Daniel urged his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to “plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2:18).

God indeed revealed the mystery, and Daniel’s life was spared. Where did the miracle begin? With prayer. Praying turned around an otherwise impossible situation.

### Apply

Spend time praying for the people in our culture with whom you most disagree. Rather than praying with anger and exasperation, ask God to break your heart for them, grow your compassion, and draw them to Jesus.

## 3 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Teachability

### Team Review

How has God been changing your heart toward those with whom you disagree?

### Assess

Why is being teachable an important part of leading in culturally divided times?

### Insights and Ideas

In the opening chapter of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to choose some young men who would train for service to the king. “He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians” (Daniel 1:4).

Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) were among those selected. After three years of training, they entered royal service.

How would you feel if you were forced to learn the literature and language of your captors? What kind of attitude would you have about applying your God-given gifts and understanding to learning about a culture that was not your own?

That’s what Daniel and his friends had to do. Yet it seems they maintained a teachable attitude, while looking to God for wisdom (verses 17–20).

Teachability is an important quality for leading in culturally divided times. There are two reasons:

1. *Teachability enables you to understand your culture.* When missionaries assume a new assignment, they must learn the language and culture of the country in which they will serve. Without this knowledge, they’ll be ineffective in their ministry efforts.

The same is true in pastoral ministry. If you want to reach lost people in your community, you can’t spend your time condemning and criticizing their culture. You must remain teachable. You don’t have to agree with the culture, but you need to understand it so you can minister effectively.

2. *Teachability equips you to respond intelligently to your culture.* Unfortunately, many church leaders today respond to culture with nothing more than shallow and misinformed opinions. Even worse, some respond in a way that makes them look (and sound) foolish, angry, and judgmental. This kind of posture gets you nowhere.

Rather than approaching cultural issues from an ivory tower, consider what part of your culture you need to understand better. Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond with wisdom and discernment, in a tone that glorifies God.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How can leaders remain teachable concerning cultural issues without compromising biblical standards?
2. What can you learn from the examples of Daniel and his friends?
3. What does it look like to respond with wisdom regarding cultural matters?

### Apply

Choose an area of culture to learn more about. Talk about it with a mature Christian leader, discussing an appropriate biblical response to the issue.



## 3 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Teachability

“He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians” (Daniel 1:4).

Teachability is an important quality for leading in culturally divided times. There are two reasons:

1. *Teachability enables you to \_\_\_\_\_ your culture.*

If you want to reach lost people in your community, you can't spend your time condemning and criticizing their culture. You must remain teachable. You don't have to agree with the culture, but you need to understand it so you can minister effectively.

2. *Teachability equips you to \_\_\_\_\_ intelligently to your culture.*

Rather than approaching cultural issues from an ivory tower, consider what part of your culture you need to understand better. Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond with wisdom and discernment, in a tone that glorifies God.

### Apply

Choose an area of culture to learn more about. Talk about it with a mature Christian leader, discussing an appropriate biblical response to the issue.

## 4 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Self-Control

### Team Review

What are you learning about culture, and what does it look like to respond intelligently to that cultural reality?

### Assess

How can Christian leaders model self-control when it comes to culture?

### Insights and Ideas

One of the powerful traits of Daniel's life was self-control. This is the ability to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. Both aspects of self-control are vital for leading during culturally divided times.

We need self-control for choosing right actions, such as practicing spiritual habits and doing good works. But we also exercise self-control by avoiding what is wrong, refusing to compromise, and resisting temptation.

Daniel understood the importance of self-control. He did what was right when he engaged in his habit of prayer, choosing to pray three times daily, despite the threat of execution.

Furthermore, Daniel modeled self-control when he and his friends entered a three-year training program under King Nebuchadnezzar. They were assigned a daily ration of food and wine from the king's table, but they were careful not to do wrong.

According to Daniel 1:8, "Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."

These rich dishes would have been tempting, but Daniel declined them. Most likely, these foods had been offered to idols. Thus, eating them would have made Daniel unclean. So, Daniel *controlled his appetite* and asked permission to consume only vegetables and water.

The chief of staff agreed to Daniel's request. The result was another distinguishing mark in Daniel's service to the king.

To lead effectively in culturally divided times, we need the powerful attribute of self-control. While it's not common in today's culture, it will distinguish you as a person of commitment and restraint.

Consider the alternative:

- *Leaders without self-control don't do what they say they will do. They lack the ability to deliver the greatest results and accomplish meaningful goals.*
- *Leaders without self-control don't reign in their appetites or avoid behavior that is harmful and unhealthy. They are prone to leadership abuses.*

Self-control is essential for today's church leaders. It keeps us from becoming like our culture. It also makes us more effective within our culture.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What aspect of self-control is more challenging for you: doing what is right or avoiding what is wrong?
2. What are the long-term ramifications of leading without self-control?
3. What kind of impact have you seen leaders make in culture by modeling self-control?

### Apply

Do a self-assessment of your current level of self-control. What improvements do you need to make? How will these improvements enhance your ability to lead with integrity in our cultural times?

## 4 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Self-Control

One of the powerful traits of Daniel's life was self-control. This is the ability to do what is \_\_\_\_\_ and avoid what is \_\_\_\_\_.

Daniel understood the importance of self-control. He did what was right when he engaged in his habit of prayer, choosing to pray three times daily, despite the threat of execution.

Furthermore, Daniel modeled self-control when he and his friends entered a three-year training program under King Nebuchadnezzar. They were assigned a daily ration of food and wine from the king's table, but they were careful not to do wrong.

"Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way" (Daniel 1:8).

To lead effectively in culturally divided times, we need the powerful attribute of self-control. Consider the alternative:

- Leaders without self-control don't \_\_\_\_\_ what they say they will do. They lack the ability to deliver the greatest \_\_\_\_\_ and accomplish meaningful \_\_\_\_\_.
- Leaders without self-control don't reign in their \_\_\_\_\_ or avoid behavior that is harmful and unhealthy. They are prone to leadership abuses.

Self-control is essential for today's church leaders. It keeps us from becoming \_\_\_\_\_ our culture. It also makes us more \_\_\_\_\_ within our culture.

### Apply

Do a self-assessment of your current level of self-control. What improvements do you need to make? How will these improvements enhance your ability to lead with integrity in our cultural times?

## 5 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Competence

### Team Review

What additional reflections have you had regarding self-control?

### Assess

What does competence do to enhance your impact in culture?

### Insights and Ideas

Culture tends to value one thing when it comes to leaders today: competence. Your abilities are valuable commodities.

Followers of Jesus must keep this in proper perspective. When leaders focus only on competence, they may neglect essential qualities like character, integrity, relationships, and devotion to God.

This isn't an either/or issue, though. We don't have to choose between character and competence, integrity and innovation, or relationships and results. All are important, as Daniel's life illustrates.

In fact, competence was one of Daniel's distinguishing qualities. After a three-year training period under King Nebuchadnezzar, no one impressed the king more than Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:19). Verse 20 says the king "found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

Clearly, God was the source of Daniel's competence. Verse 17 says, "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."

However, most God-given gifts are also cultivated over time as we participate in their development.

Daniel embraced his God-given gifts while simultaneously stewarding them wisely through discipline and learning.

We can follow Daniel's example by recognizing God's gifts within us and then applying discipline to their development.

Consider five ways competence helps you lead in culturally divided times:

1. *Competence meets needs and solves problems.*
2. *Competence earns you respect from cultural leaders.*
3. *Competence gives you credibility and trust.*
4. *Competence opens other doors.*
5. *Competence makes it easier for others to see your good deeds and praise your Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16).*

When engaging with culture, nobody cares who you are or what you stand for if what you do lacks excellence.

The point of developing competence isn't gaining fame, prestige, or notoriety. The goal is using your God-given abilities to make the greatest difference and advance the greatest good.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How does the statement that Daniel was "ten times more capable" inspire you to grow your abilities?
2. How have you seen a Christian leader's competence set him or her apart in culture?
3. What happens when we don't give enough attention to growing our competence?

### Apply

Choose an ability you need to grow to the next level. Don't settle for "getting by." Instead, let your competence become a mark of excellence in your leadership. Map out a growth plan, and then find a friend or trusted advisor who can hold you accountable.

## 5 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Competence

Competence was one of Daniel's distinguishing qualities. After a three-year training period under King Nebuchadnezzar, no one impressed the king more than Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:19). Verse 20 says the king "found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom."

"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (Daniel 1:17).

Daniel embraced his God-given gifts while simultaneously stewarding them wisely through discipline and learning.

How competence helps you lead in culturally divided times:

1. Competence meets \_\_\_\_\_ and solves \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Competence earns you \_\_\_\_\_ from cultural leaders.
3. Competence gives you \_\_\_\_\_ and trust.
4. Competence opens other \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Competence makes it easier for others to see your \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and praise your Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16).

When engaging with culture, nobody cares who you are or what you stand for if what you do lacks excellence.

### Apply

Choose an ability you need to grow to the next level. Don't settle for "getting by." Instead, let your competence become a mark of excellence in your leadership. Map out a growth plan, and then find a friend or trusted advisor who can hold you accountable.

## 6 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Character

### Team Review

What area of competence are you focused on growing right now?

### Assess

How does character create culture?

### Insights and Ideas

**C**haracter matters — and not just when you’re starting your leadership journey. It matters for every area of life, every season of leadership, and every aspect of culture. Without character, you won’t be the kind of leader others will want to follow.

Author Carey Nieuwhof observes, “Your competency leaves the first impression, but your character leaves the lasting one ... character matters more than anything because you bring who you are into everything you do.”

Daniel modeled this powerful truth in his life. Character was a distinguishing trait that had profound results. Consider three examples:

1. *Daniel chose character over convenience.* Daniel chose not to defile himself by eating from King Nebuchadnezzar’s table (Daniel 1). It wasn’t a convenient thing to do. In fact, it was risky. But Daniel’s life wasn’t about doing what was easy. Daniel was determined to do what was right.
2. *Daniel chose character over carrots.* Leadership authors sometimes talk about incentivizing behavior through “carrots” (rewards). King Belshazzar tried to employ this method with Daniel.

When fingers suddenly appeared and began writing on a wall during a dinner party for Belshazzar, the king was terrified (Daniel 5:5–6). Eventually, Belshazzar summoned Daniel and offered him rewards: “If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom” (verse 16).

However, Daniel’s motivation was pleasing God, not obtaining human honor, wealth, and power. Therefore, Daniel said, “You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means” (verse 17).

3. *Daniel chose character over corruption.* While Daniel was serving under King Darius, he so distinguished himself that the king intended to set him over his entire kingdom (Daniel 6:3). This made the other administrators jealous, so they tried to discredit Daniel’s character.

Yet verse 4 says, “They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.” Daniel chose character over corruption, and it was obvious to everyone.

Rather than influencing others by the weight of your title, become intentional about developing character so you can influence by the weight of your life.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the three examples of Daniel’s character most inspire you? Why?
2. How does good character help you lead in culturally divided times?
3. When are you most tempted to compromise character as a leader?

### Apply

Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your character and reveal any areas of weakness. What changes do you need to make? Take these issues seriously, and begin cultivating trustworthy character at

## 6

## LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Character

“Your competency leaves the first impression, but your character leaves the lasting one ... character matters more than anything because you bring who you are into everything you do.” — Carey Nieuwhof

1. *Daniel chose character over* \_\_\_\_\_.

Daniel chose not to defile himself by eating from King Nebuchadnezzar’s table (Daniel 1).

2. *Daniel chose character over* \_\_\_\_\_.

Leadership authors sometimes talk about incentivizing behavior through “carrots” (rewards). King Belshazzar tried to employ this method with Daniel.

“If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom” (Daniel 5:16).

However, Daniel’s motivation was pleasing God, not obtaining human honor, wealth, and power.

3. *Daniel chose character over* \_\_\_\_\_.

“They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent” (Daniel 6:4).

**Apply**

Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your character and reveal any areas of weakness. What changes do you need to make? Take these issues seriously, and begin cultivating trustworthy character at the deepest levels.

## 7 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

# Humility

### Team Review

How have you been challenged to cultivate deeper character?

### Assess

Why is humility so attractive in others but less attractive in ourselves?

### Insights and Ideas

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes said, "The chief proof of a man's real greatness lies in the perception of his smallness."

That's not a popular view in today's American culture, but it speaks to the heart of good leadership. Proudful people make themselves look strong, but this is the fastest route to a downfall in leadership. Humility is the path to greatness.

Unfortunately, many church leaders exude arrogance rather than humility. This does not reflect the heart of Jesus, who ministered from a posture of servanthood and responded to people with love and compassion.

So, how can we engage a culture that views meekness as weakness? Daniel's story provides another example.

Daniel was at the top of the class, and the last thing King Darius wanted was to lose his best leader. But when Daniel prayed to God instead of Darius, the king upheld his law, sending Daniel to the lions' den.

After a sleepless night, Darius rushed to the lions' den to check on Daniel's status. The king called out, inquiring about Daniel's well-being.

Daniel's response demonstrated his humility: "May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty" (Daniel 6:21–22).

In this passage, Daniel shows humility in two ways:

1. *Daniel gave credit to God.* He acknowledged God was the One who shut the lions' mouths. Daniel didn't take credit for what happened, but directed all the glory to God alone.
2. *Daniel gave respect to the king.* Daniel spoke humbly and respectfully to the king. Humility was part of Daniel's character. It set the tone for his life and leadership.

To lead effectively in an egotistical culture, we must choose the path of humility. That's the path Jesus marked out for us during His ministry.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What makes a humble leader appealing to others?
2. How does a humble response to culture foster dialogue rather than dispute?
3. How can we apply Daniel's lessons on humility in today's culture?

### Apply

Humility is a lifelong pursuit. Spend some time in prayer, repenting of pride and inviting the Spirit to point out areas where you need to develop greater humility. Read Matthew 23, considering what it teaches about the dangers of pride.



## 7

## LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Humility

“The chief proof of a man’s real greatness lies in the perception of his smallness.” — Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes

Daniel was at the top of the class, and the last thing King Darius wanted was to lose his best leader. But when Daniel prayed to God instead of Darius, the king upheld his law, sending Daniel to the lions’ den.

After a sleepless night, Darius rushed to the lions’ den to check on Daniel’s status. The king called out, inquiring about Daniel’s well-being.

Daniel’s response demonstrated his humility: “May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty” (Daniel 6:21–22).

1. Daniel gave \_\_\_\_\_ to God.

He acknowledged God was the One who shut the lions’ mouths. Daniel didn’t take credit for what happened, but directed all the glory to God alone.

2. Daniel gave \_\_\_\_\_ to the king.

Daniel spoke humbly and respectfully to the king. Humility was part of Daniel’s character. It set the tone for his life and leadership.

**Apply**

Humility is a lifelong pursuit. Spend some time in prayer, repenting of pride and inviting the Spirit to point out areas where you need to develop greater humility. Read Matthew 23, considering what it teaches about the dangers of pride.

## 8

## LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Wisdom

**Team Review**

What are you learning about the importance and power of humility in leadership?

**Assess**

What does it look like to be a wise leader in today's culture?

**Insights and Ideas**

Leading in culturally divided times can be challenging and complex. But the best leaders operate in God's wisdom. Again, Daniel offers us a great example.

When King Nebuchadnezzar insisted his astrologers not only interpret his dream, but also reveal *what* he dreamed, nobody could do it. Facing this unreasonable demand, the leaders of the day were in a quandary.

Yet Daniel 2:14 says, "When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact."

Daniel's response highlights five aspects of wisdom that are applicable for leadership today.

1. *Wisdom shows restraint.* When Daniel heard the king's order, he didn't say, "Nebuchadnezzar is an irrational idiot. Who does he think he is?" Instead, Daniel chose restraint.
2. *Wisdom speaks with grace.* Verse 14 says Daniel's response was tactful. If there's one thing we could use more of when navigating conflict, it's tact. As John Maxwell says, we need to stop *correcting* and start *connecting*.

As followers of Jesus, Christian leaders must master this important lesson: Speak truth in the tone of grace. Truth without grace is mean. Grace without truth is meaningless. It's not either/or. We need truth delivered in the tone of grace.

3. *Wisdom searches for clarity.* Daniel knew there had to be more to the story, so he asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" (verse 15). Then Daniel listened as the officer explained the matter. Daniel didn't jump to conclusions. He moved forward with wisdom.
4. *Wisdom suggests a solution.* Verse 16 says, "At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him." Daniel didn't demand his way. He suggested a simple, logical solution.

How might this wise approach help us during times of tension?

5. *Wisdom seeks God.* Daniel didn't use the time he requested from the king to concoct a humanly devised plan. Instead, Daniel and his friends prayed, and God revealed the mystery (2:17–19).

This is the path of wisdom. We can apply these principles today while leading through culturally divided times.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. Which of the five principles above most challenges you? Why?
2. When do you need to do a better job of speaking in the tone of grace?
3. What other lessons can you draw from Daniel's wise response?

**Apply**

Do an honest examination of your response to culture. Does it truly reflect the Spirit of Jesus? List two or three changes you need to make. Then share those with a friend who can help you stay on track.

## 8

## LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Wisdom

“When Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact” (Daniel 2:14).

Five expressions of wisdom:

1. *Wisdom shows* \_\_\_\_\_.

When Daniel heard the king’s order, he didn’t say, “Nebuchadnezzar is an irrational idiot. Who does he think he is?” Instead, Daniel chose restraint.

2. *Wisdom speaks with* \_\_\_\_\_.

As followers of Jesus, Christian leaders must master this important lesson: Speak

\_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

Truth without grace is mean. Grace without truth is meaningless.

3. *Wisdom searches for* \_\_\_\_\_.

Daniel knew there had to be more to the story, so he asked the king’s officer, “Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?” (verse 15). Then Daniel listened as the officer explained the matter. Daniel didn’t jump to conclusions. He moved forward with wisdom.

4. *Wisdom suggests a* \_\_\_\_\_.

“At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him” (Daniel 2:16).

5. *Wisdom seeks* \_\_\_\_\_.

Daniel and his friends prayed, and God revealed the mystery (2:17–19).

**Apply**

Do an honest examination of your response to culture. Does it truly reflect the Spirit of Jesus? List two or three changes you need to make. Then share those with a friend who can help you stay on track.

## 9

## LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Courage

**Team Review**

How have you applied principles of wisdom as you've interacted with others in culture?

**Assess**

What does it mean to be a courageous leader in culturally divided times?

**Insights and Ideas**

C.S. Lewis once said, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point." Without courage, you won't be a person of love, grace, truth, commitment, or self-control, because courage is necessary to live and lead with all these qualities.

During times of testing, courage helps you make God-honoring decisions.

Daniel had plenty of opportunities to go with the flow. But he courageously maintained his integrity and brought glory to God.

Consider the following two examples.

1. *Daniel had the courage to do what's right.* When King Darius ordered everyone to pray only to him or face execution, Daniel didn't back down. Daniel 6:10–11 says, "When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help."

Instead of altering his habit of prayer until the king's order expired, Daniel had the courage of his convictions — even if the consequence was death. Courage helps us rise above circumstances, so we can continue doing what's right in the face of fear.

2. *Daniel had the courage to speak truth to power.* When Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, the king shared it with Daniel, seeking a clear interpretation. Daniel 4:19 says, "Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, 'Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.'"

This dream was not good news for Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel knew it. It would mean the end of his reign unless the king repented. But Daniel was willing to speak the truth no matter what.

Daniel said, "Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue" (Daniel 4:27). Daniel was gracious, but he also spoke truthfully.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. Who's the most courageous leader you've ever known?
2. In what areas of leadership do you most struggle to have courage?
3. What is the difference between ordinary human courage and righteous courage?

**Apply**

Reflect on your own leadership. In what area do you need to grow in Christlike courage? Identify two courageous steps you can take next.

## 9

## LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Courage

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.”  
— C.S. Lewis

Daniel had plenty of opportunities to go with the flow. But he courageously maintained his integrity and brought glory to God.

1. *Daniel had the courage to do what's* \_\_\_\_\_.

“When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help” (Daniel 6:10–11).

2. *Daniel had the courage to speak* \_\_\_\_\_ *to* \_\_\_\_\_.

“Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you’” (Daniel 4:19).

“Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue” (Daniel 4:27).

**Apply**

Reflect on your own leadership. In what area do you need to grow in Christlike courage? Identify two courageous steps you can take next.

# 10 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Consistency

### Team Review

How are you becoming a more courageous leader?

### Assess

In what areas of life do leaders need to model the greatest consistency?

### Insights and Ideas

In this series of lessons, we've learned several essential qualities for leading in culturally divided times. Daniel modeled each quality, despite the hostility of the culture to the ways and wisdom of God.

Christian leaders seeking to make a difference in their culture must do the same. In every time and place, these are enduring traits of culture-shaping leaders.

These qualities are vital for church leadership — not just occasionally, but every day. That's why the final trait is so important: consistency.

John Maxwell offers a helpful equation for understanding the value of consistency: "Right Choices + Consistency + Time = Significant Returns." When we do what's right, consistently, over a long period of time, we will experience blessings beyond what we can even imagine.

Consider the alternative. If any one of the 10 qualities we've discovered in this series is missing, it will negatively impact our ability to lead faithfully.

1. *Without commitment, you'll lose your spiritual footing in culture.*
2. *Without prayer, you'll approach culture with the limits of human ability.*
3. *Without teachability, you won't seek to understand culture.*
4. *Without self-control, you'll be overrun by the appetites of culture.*
5. *Without competence, you won't lead effectively in culture.*
6. *Without character, you'll become like culture.*
7. *Without humility, you'll take credit for your impact in culture.*
8. *Without wisdom, you'll respond poorly to culture.*
9. *Without courage, you'll waiver when tested in culture.*
10. *Without consistency, your influence will never compound.*

Each quality is essential, and Daniel modeled all of them — not once, but over a lifetime. And what was the outcome? Daniel experienced influence throughout the reigns of four kings.

Daniel didn't compromise his faith. He remained committed to God, prayerful, teachable, self-controlled, competent, and full of character. He acted with humility, wisdom, and courage. None of it was an afterthought for Daniel. He consistently modeled each distinguishing quality.

As a result, "Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom" (Daniel 6:3).

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the qualities in this series is your greatest strength, and which is your greatest weakness?
2. In what area of your life have you personally experienced the power of consistency?
3. How does consistency benefit your efforts to lead effectively in culture?

### Apply

Give yourself a *consistency grade* for each of the qualities in this lesson series. Identify your lowest grade, and consider what you can do to improve it. Put together an improvement plan so you may begin growing in that area.

# 10 | LEADING IN CULTURALLY DIVIDED TIMES

## Consistency

In this series of lessons, we've learned several essential qualities to lead in culturally divided times. Daniel modeled each quality, despite the hostility of the culture to the ways and wisdom of God.

“Right Choices + Consistency + Time = Significant Returns.” — John Maxwell

When we do what's right, consistently, over a long period of time, we will experience blessings beyond what we can even imagine.

1. *Without commitment, you'll lose your spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ in culture.*
2. *Without prayer, you'll approach culture with the \_\_\_\_\_ of human ability.*
3. *Without teachability, you won't seek to \_\_\_\_\_ culture.*
4. *Without self-control, you'll be overrun by the \_\_\_\_\_ of culture.*
5. *Without competence, you won't \_\_\_\_\_ effectively in culture.*
6. *Without character, you'll become \_\_\_\_\_ culture.*
7. *Without humility, you'll take \_\_\_\_\_ for your impact in culture.*
8. *Without wisdom, you'll \_\_\_\_\_ poorly to culture.*
9. *Without courage, you'll waiver when \_\_\_\_\_ in culture.*
10. *Without consistency, your influence will never \_\_\_\_\_.*

“Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom” (Daniel 6:3).

### Apply

Give yourself a *consistency grade* for each of the qualities in this lesson series. Identify your lowest grade, and consider what you can do to improve it. Put together an improvement plan so you may begin growing in that area.