

Ministry in Our City

As exiles and strangers, we seek the welfare of the city where God has placed us.



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Jeremiah 29:4-7

August 16, 2020

(Jeremiah 29:4-7) ⁴ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, 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."

(1 Peter 2:11-12) ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

(1 Thessalonians 4:9-12) ⁹ Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, ¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- **Where is your hometown? What do you love about the place you are from? What might you change about it?**
- **If you are living in a city that is different from the one where you are from, what have you come to appreciate about the place where you live right now?**

We tend to develop particular kinds of relationships with places where we spend a good amount of time. The more time we spend in a place, the more closely we can see its warts and pitfalls as well as its strengths and beauty. Most people enjoy finding a place they can call home. In contrast to this, the Bible always tells us to see ourselves as exiles —as people living in a place that isn't quite our own, even if it is a place we have lived our whole lives. While feeling out of place, though, we are supposed to make the most of God's mission in the places to which He has called us.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer read Jeremiah 29:4-7

- **Who deported the people of Israel to Babylon? Why is this an important point for Israel, and for us, to remember? How does this change the way we think about where we live?**
- **Why do you think God told them to "build houses and plant gardens"? How did God see their location differently than they did?**

God deported the people of Israel to Babylon. God doesn't blame it on King Nebuchadnezzar; God says that He Himself deported the people. While the Lord deported the people of Israel as a punishment, He also intended to bless them in the land of Babylon. Israel can take hope in the fact that nothing that has happened to them has happened because God failed to protect them. God is sovereign, and Israel was exactly where He wanted them to be. While they were in a place they never hoped to be, He essentially told them to make themselves at home because they were going to be there for a while.

- **How were God's instructions to Israel here in captivity reminiscent of God's instruction to Adam and Eve?**

- How does verse 7 fit in with God's plan to bless the nations through His people? What type of relationship must we develop with the place we live in order for this to happen?

In Genesis, God placed Adam and Eve in a garden. He told them to be fruitful and multiply. In this passage, God uprooted Israel and told them to "plant gardens," and right after He told them this, He commanded them to "multiply there; do not decrease." While Babylon is no paradise, God told the people that He would be with them and bless them in their sojourn in the land of Babylon. One of the ways God is filling the Earth with His glory is through His followers that He intentionally places around the globe. God cares about the places we live. You can be sure that He does because He has placed us there to represent Him.

Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 2:11-12

- What does it mean to be a "stranger" or a "temporary resident." How does this idea relate to God's commands in Jeremiah 29?
- What do you think it looks like to "conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles"? How is God's kingdom advanced as a result of doing what Peter asks in these verses?

A stranger or a temporary resident is an immigrant. It describes someone who is not fully at home. As God's chosen people living in a sinful and broken world, in some ways, we will always be out of step with the world around us, feeling that tension is actually a good thing. While we make the most of the places God has called, it is equally important that we not feel so comfortable that we assimilate.

The spiritual life of Christians affects those around them, both believers and non-believers. Peter sees the abstaining from sin not just as a way to press into God and grow spiritually but also as an outward sign of the change that God began. By doing what is good, a believer grows closer to God and participates in God's purpose of spreading the message to all people. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul addressed what this means practically.

Have a volunteer read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

- What do you make of Paul's instruction in verse 11? Is this characteristic of most Christians you know? Why or why not?
- Do you struggle with apathy, restlessness, being meddlesome, or idleness? Why should we consider what people will think about the God we serve based on the life we live?

After commending the Thessalonians' love for one another, Paul addressed the way they lived in their community. To keep the Thessalonians from giving a poor example, Paul suggested believers live quiet lives, minding their own business and working hard. Paul is not suggesting that Christians remove themselves from society or refuse to take a stand on important issues, but rather that they think critically about what message their life sends to their community. As far as it depends on us, we want to be seen as a help not a hindrance.

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- Do you see the place you live as a very real mission field that God has chosen for you? Why or why not? Why do we not have to travel the globe or even leave our city to live as sent ones?
- How does involving ourselves in community help us to feel the tension of living in a broken world while also investing in it?
- What are some ways that you can invest in your city and its people? How can you leverage these opportunities to make disciples of Jesus?

PRAYER: Praise God for putting you exactly where He wants you to be. Ask for His guidance for how to spend your time there. Pray that you would not feel so at home that you fail to see the mission in front of you and that you wouldn't feel so out of place that you wouldn't dig into and love the place God has called you to.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Jer. 31:31-40, 32-33
 DAY 2 – Jer. 52, 2 Kings 24-25
 DAY 3 – Ezek. 1:1-3, 36:16-38, 37
 DAY 4 – Daniel 1-2
 DAY 5 – Daniel 3-4

KEY VERSE: Ezekiel 36:26-27

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God's Story. Visit chetscreek.com/gods-story for videos, study guides, and more.

OUR VISION

To be a church
 for the unchurched,
 here and around the world.

ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

Jeremiah 29:4-7

Jeremiah's letter must have arrived in Babylon shortly after the exiles did. It warned that this would not be a short exile. Jeremiah's advice to the exiles was remarkable. He urged them to pray for Babylon and its prosperity. By doing this the exiles would prosper as well (1Tim 2:1-2).

1 Peter 2:11-12

2:11. Peter addressed these believers as "temporary residents," forms of which were used in chapter 1 (vv. 1,17). Like this term, "aliens" also was used first of Jews in the dispersion following the Babylonian exile. Here they refer to Christians as exiles on this earth. As God's new people and new priesthood, the readers were to draw back from every temptation to satisfy the desires of the flesh. "Fleshly" does not mean simply "bodily." "Flesh" in the New Testament refers to human desires that do not result from the Holy Spirit's work. The unspiritual desires war against you, Peter wrote. Fleshly desires are not only sinful, they also are self-destructive.

2:12. Peter called on these believers to live such honorable lives that they would refute all the false accusations against them. Their good works would not only give the lie to every accusation, but their deeds also would convince even their accusers that God was at work in them. "Glorify God" means both to praise God and to confess that God is always right.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

The reference to brotherly love (Gk philadelphia) seems to govern the content of these verses in encouraging fellow Christians to lead a quiet life, mind one's own business, and work with one's hands. To do otherwise places a burden of dependence on the community of faith and gives a poor testimony to outsiders (5:14; 2Th 3:7-12). Paul demonstrated this work ethic by providing for his own needs (1Th 2:9).