

Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides

Oct 8th

Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “home”?
2. What was the home like that you grew up in?

Bible Study Questions

1. In 1st Peter 1:1, he refers to Christians as “exiles”. Our true home is with Jesus, yet we find ourselves in this broken world. How do you resonate with the idea of being in “exile”?
2. Imagine that you were one of the Jewish exiles addressed in Jeremiah. Your nation was still standing, but you had been forcibly moved to another country. How would you react? What would you be motivated to do? Assimilate? Escape? Throw a Pity Party?
3. Read Jeremiah 29:1-14
 - What instructions does God give to the exiles?
 - How would you have reacted if you were receiving this message?
 - Why were these instructions so important in God’s grand plan for the Jewish people?
4. Pastor Michael talked about different ways that we respond to exile today. Protection, Assimilation, occupation, or owning strangerhood.
 - What do protection, assimilation, and occupation get right and where do they fall short of God’s commands?
 - One of the problems with occupation is that we make our culture our “home” and defending it our purpose instead of pursuing our home in the kingdom of God. Why is this so dangerous?
 - Which of these mindsets do you most resonate with?
5. Jesus promised that his presence would always be with us (Matthew 28:30). What difference does his presence make as we seek to live in exile?

Oct 15th: Letter to the Exiles

We all desire a world filled with peace in which everyone is treated with respect and dignity. As Christians, we dream of a world filled with God's shalome, or good rule. Yet, our news headlines are constantly filled with stories of wars and conflict. Even closer to home, we deal with polarization and the breakdown of families. Perhaps that is why the New Testament refers to Christians as being in exile. Our home is in God's kingdom, yet we find ourselves living in this broken world.

In 598 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took 10,000 people back to Babylon as exiles. They didn't know if they should assimilate, fight, or prepare for a hasty return to Judah. It is in this context, that Jeremiah sends them a special letter from God.

I. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (Jeremiah 29:1-23)

- **Live full normal lives (v. 5-6):** They aren't coming home any time soon. So they should build homes, marry, and have kids. They are to do all the things that they normally would do back in Judah.
- **Seek the prosperity of the city (v. 7):** This would have been a tough pill to swallow. Instead of being bitter toward Babylon, they were to pray for it and seek its prosperity.
- **Maintain your identity as God's people:** This is not clearly stated, but God promises in verse 10 that in 70 years they will return to Judah. In order to do that, they need to maintain their ethnic identity.
- **Know that exile is not permanent (v. 10):** God promises to bring them back. As a result, are to settle in, but not be too settled in. They will come back home.

II. Our response to life in exile: There are passages in the New Testament that describe Christians as being in exile (John 15:19, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 1:1). Christians have a number of reactions to life in exile:

- **Reject a protectionist mindset:** This group is committed to maintaining their identity, but instead of seeking the prosperity of the city, they reject out of fear that they may be contaminated in the process. The goal is to bunker down and stay safe until Jesus comes back. Yet, it rejects our command to be in the world being Jesus' witnesses.
- **Reject an assimilation mindset:** This group seeks the prosperity of the city, but sacrifices their own identity by joining in the values of the world. The rejects the Biblical command to be "holy"

- **Reject an occupation mindset:** During the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were in their land, but they were being occupied by a hostile force. The result is that they sought to overthrow that force by any means necessary. It is notable that the New Testament uses exile language instead. Today, many American Christians view secularism as a threat to our Christian heritage that needs to be overthrown. When this happens, America becomes an idol replacing the kingdom of God as our true home. Defending our land becomes the focus instead of pursuing Christ.
 - **Own our own strangerhood:** Jim Elliot coined this phrase about the Christian life. It recognizes that the world is not our home, but that God has placed us here for this time. Therefore, we need to make the most of what God has given us, living out our faith and pointing others to Christ.
- ### III. Know that God's presence is with us in exile:
- Many of the Jews feared that they would no longer have access to God while in exile. Yet God's presence was still with them. He declares in verse 11 that he still has plans for his people. For us, exile can be a lonely place to be. Yet Jesus has promised to be with us (Matthew 28:30). We don't do it alone.