

Life Group Leader Guide: “Integrity When It’s Hard and When it Hurts”

Dates: 1/31/21- 2/6/21

Video:

Show the video. It is about 3 minutes long.

Scripture: Jeremiah 29: 1-14

A Letter to the Exiles

29 This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. **2** (This was after King Jehoiachin^[a] and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) **3** He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said: **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.” **8** Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. **9** They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the Lord. **10** This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. **11** For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. **12** Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **13** You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. **14** I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity.^[b] I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Reflection Time

- We recommend taking about 4-5 minutes for people to reflect after the passage. But before you do, say something like:
 - “I encourage you to first take a couple minutes to reflect on this passage and the video, come up with any questions, connections, or what the passage says to you tonight.”

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Question: How do you think this message would have been received by the exiles in Babylon?

Question: Sometimes it is easier to live in a fantasy than confront the difficult season we are experiencing. How do you see the false prophets that Jeremiah names in verses 8 and 9 reflect this?

Question: God clearly commands His people to pray for the city of Babylon and its prosperity, even though it represented their oppressors. How would you respond to this? Do you see any parallel situations in modern times for Christians?

Observation: In Genesis 22, God makes a covenant with Abraham and says that his offspring will be “a blessing to all the nations.” Even in the middle of their exile, God is still fulfilling the covenant He made. They still have a mission.

Question: What is something that God has called you to do, or *someone* God has called you to be regardless of season?

Question: What do you see as the consequences of a life whose primary motivation is pain avoidance?

Question: What are ways that you are prone to avoid pain or check out from a difficult season?

Observation: Sometimes, rather than enduring pain, people can begin to equate pain with spirituality and pursue it. This is as unhealthy as doing everything you can to avoid pain.

Question: How have you seen this in your own life or in the church? How have you seen this set you or other people back?

Question: God gives the Israelites several charges in verses 5-7. What do you think his specific purpose could have been in each of those charges (marry, build, plant, increase in number, pray)

Observation: God takes trials and painful experiences and cultivates holy qualities in us.

Question: What is an ongoing struggle or trial you are currently experiencing? What is God growing in you through this experience?

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Prayer:

(LIFE GROUP LEADERS):