

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 How has your perspective of God been impacted by this message?
- 2 What is keeping you away from God's plan for your life and how is relying on your own planning failing you?
- 3 As you reflect on Jeremiah 29:11, what stands out to you about the way God works in the lives of his people?

WE DO LIFE TOGETHER!

If you haven't been involved in a LIFE Group yet, send us a message us thru Fb, and we will get you connected to a small group.

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SUNDAY WORD

APR. 30, 2023



Jeremiah 29:11 - "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (NKJV)"

We will never understand this verse unless we know something about its background. Jeremiah 29:11 was written to the Jewish exiles in Babylon who had been forcibly removed or taken away from their own land in Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. They were in captivity due to sin and disobedience to God. For many generations, God's people had been doing their own thing, going their own way, living life to please the flesh, and willfully disobeying God's laws. Jeremiah, the prophet along with many other prophets prior to him had warned God's people to turn away from idolatry and sin and turn back to God, but instead, they continued in their way.

Now, did they learn a thing or two about their current situation? Of course, they did! They were desperate for God. They wanted God to help them get out of that miserable place. Imagine this, they were uprooted from all they held dear. They now live hundreds of kilometers away from home, in the heart of a worldly and pagan-idol-worship place, Babylon. All their dreams and hopes had been shattered. They wondered, "Does God still care about us?" They wondered if God had forgotten them.

As we think about this well-loved verse, keep two things in mind: God will not always do what we expect Him to do. But He will always do what He promises He will do. With that as background, let's consider THREE TRUTHS FROM JEREMIAH 29:11:

GOD THINKS ABOUT US

Jeremiah 29:11a - "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you..." (NKJV)



God thinks about us! That may be the most important statement you'll ever hear. The God of the universe thinks about us. God knows who we are and where we are. Not for one second are we ever lost or forgotten.

Most of us are better at remembering bad things. It's easy to focus on the faults. But the good thing is, God is not like us. God forgets our sins, but He remembers us. We do the opposite. We forget our friends, but we remember their sins. No wonder we're so messed up. Even though God has the whole world to run, He never forgets His children. He knows your face, He understands your pain, and He records every tear you shed.

This would have been a big encouragement to the Jews who were in captivity in far-off Babylon. God has just said, "You'll be returning home but not for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10)." That meant they wouldn't be in Babylon forever. But 70 years is a long time to be banned from going back to your own country. God says, "You think I've forgotten you? You are here because you forgot me, and it's true I am punishing you for your sin, but my punishment does not diminish my affection for you. You are forever in my thoughts. You are still my people. I have not forgotten you."

We find great comfort in the following truth: God knows what He is thinking even when we don't. Many times we have said, "Lord, what are you doing? Why is this happening?" So much of life makes no sense. The good and the bad, the happy and the sad. It all gets jumbled together for no apparent reason. Even if we say to ourselves, "God has a plan," it's rarely clear to us. But God knows what He's thinking even when His thoughts are hidden from us.

GOD'S THOUGHTS TOWARD US ARE GOOD

Jeremiah 29:11b - "...thoughts of peace and not of evil...(NKJV)"

It is not enough to know that God thinks about us. We need to know what He is thinking. In this case, He makes it clear. "Thoughts of peace, and not of evil." The translators render this phrase in different ways:

"...Plans for WELFARE and not for evil..." (ESV)

"...Plans to TAKE CARE of you, not abandon you..." (MSG)

"...Plans for GOOD and not for disaster..." (NLT)

This answers our greatest question: Is God for us or against us? The 18th-century German philosopher Lessing asked, "Is this a friendly universe?" Here we have God's answer. All His thoughts move toward one expected end. Nothing happens by chance or for no purpose at all. As one writer said, "Every affliction is timed and measured."

We will never properly understand Jeremiah 29:11 if we think it is a divine amulet to bring us good luck to protect us from pain or to keep us from suffering. Remember that this verse was given to the Jews to give them hope that their time in Babylon would not last forever. It is not a "Get Out of Babylon Free" card. It is God's way of saying, "I still love you even though you have blown it badly, and I still have great plans for you in the future, and the future starts today, not just 70 years from now."

"But what about when we sin? Does God still love us then?" Good question! All of us sin, and we sin more than we know. We're not as good as we think we are, and we're worse off than we know. How does Jeremiah 29:11 help us when we blow it big time? Even when we sin, God does not think evil toward us because that goes against His nature. God disciplines us to bring us back. Just like our parents, they discipline us not because they hate us but because they love us. God disciplines us to bring us back to the right path.

When the devil whispers in your ear, "You're rotten. You're no good.", God still loves you and cannot think evil against you. Even when we suffer because of our sins, God intends to bring us to repentance and healing. God's love for us doesn't change even when we sin. That's what grace is all about. Grace that only works when we are good is no grace at all. We need grace that runs to us when we have acted stupidly for the 30th time. We need "30th-time" grace, and that's what we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. We all know that's true, but we forget it until life falls apart.

GOD GIVES US FUTURE AND HOPE

Jeremiah 29:11c - "...to give you a future and a hope." (NKJV)

King James Version says, "to give you an expected end (KJV)." God is not just giving a vague promise that things are going to be better sometime, somewhere, somehow. God is giving us an EXPECTED end. That's true, of course, but this verse has a particular focus. God has an appointed end for His people, and nothing will hinder them from reaching that appointed end. "Our DISAPPOINTMENT can be God's APPOINTMENT."

Seventy years down the road the same God who raised up a pagan King Nebuchadnezzar to judge the Jews will raise up another pagan King Cyrus to deliver them. Neither the pagan king was aware of his part in God's plan. Each man acted according to his own free will, and God worked through those kingly decisions to bring His children home.

The Lord has no unfinished plans. That includes sending His people to Babylon, keeping them there for 70 years, and then bringing them home once again. Seen in this light, Jeremiah 29:11 becomes a great comfort, especially when we go through hard times. It teaches us that God thinks of us, that His thoughts toward us are good, and that when His purposes have been completed, He will bring our troubles to their appointed end. This is the "hope and future" we all need. We cannot skip the "furnace times" of life. They are part of God's purpose to make us ultimately strong and useful. That may not seem like much consolation when you feel the heat blasting around you. But know this much, When your trial has come to its appointed end, you will come forth stronger than before.

Most of the time we only focus on Jeremiah 29:11 but skip the part on what would make God turn and listen to us once again. Jeremiah 29:12-13 says, "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. (NIV)" In our time of crisis, God knows we will be calling out to Him. God says that He will listen. However, we will not find Him until after we seek Him with all our hearts. More than anything, in every situation, God wants to capture our hearts. The circumstances that bring us to this position are always just the details.

What should we say in response to all of this? Our first and greatest need is to submit ourselves to our Heavenly Father and say very simply, "Lord, you see what is ahead even when all is dark to me. You have a purpose even when my life seems to be going in circles. I bow before you and say, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Amen."

Our God is faithful to keep every one of His promises. Nothing can happen to us except it first passes through the hands of a loving God. If your way is dark, keep believing in God's promises to you. When you finally get to heaven, you will look back over your life with all its twists and turns, and you will say, "Jesus led me all the way."