

Exile and Return: Stewarding Exile

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Much meaning might not be apparent when you see it on a bumper sticker, T-shirt or plaque. A few verses prior, God tells his people they are about to be exiled from their home.

They will return, but while they are in Babylon, God tells them to:

“Build houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat their fruit. ... Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive” (verses 5, 7a).

Humanity has been exiled from the garden. The garden is our true home. The garden is a physical place with physical manifestations of this vocation. But the garden is much more than that. The unique vocation of humanity does not get washed out in the receding tide of the fall.

The garden embodies the relationship God intended to have with humanity. And we are commanded to cultivate that garden, no matter where we are, no matter what we are doing.

During this period of exile from the physical garden, our task remains. We are to dwell on this earth as the exiles of Israel lived. God instructed them to build houses and dwell in Babylon as though it was their home while awaiting their promised return to their true home in the promised land.

Our ability to love, to serve and to worship is not limited to the times and places that are most convenient. We are children of exile in many ways. But more importantly, we are children of

God. While we are where we are, we are called to worship.

We may hope to return home; we may long for the time when our circumstances will indeed be made right. But we are not inept until that day; we are activated even in exile.

While we live in this fallen world, we are to make it our temporary home. We are to build houses and establish relationships. Since we are exiled, we must do this by faith. And we are to seek the peace of our current world. The best way to seek peace is to live our lives in harmony with the original intentions of the garden because we carry its vocation with us. {eoa}

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