

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 Your current situation, even if challenging, is where you are meant to be according to God's plan. How does this affect your outlook if you believe God put you there for a reason?
- 2 Reflect on Pastor Edmund Chan's statement: "Truth doesn't change lives. It is truth applied that changes our lives." How can you apply this principle to your own life experiences?
- 3 In what ways can you find hope and encouragement in knowing that God is with you, even in tough times?

WE DO LIFE TOGETHER!



SCAN QR

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.

www.facebook.com/wwcfcebu

CONTACT US

(032) 254 8934
0916 276 1067
0942 174 4296

www.wwcfcebu.org
cebuwwcf@gmail.com

ADDRESS

369-L Juana Osmena Ext.,
Camputhaw, Cebu City 6000

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SUNDAY WORD

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Jeremiah 29:11 - "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 (NIV)."

Let's explore the background of the story behind Jeremiah 29:11. In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army took control of Jerusalem after defeating Judah's army. They captured King Jehoiakim and plundered silver and gold from Solomon's temple. Then, King Jehoiachin took over briefly before Nebuchadnezzar took him away also to Babylon with more temple treasures. Around 10,000 people, including skilled workers and leaders, were taken captive, leaving only the poorest behind. When Zedekiah became king, Nebuchadnezzar went all out, destroying the city, including its walls and temple, leaving it in ruins. Zedekiah was captured, his sons killed before him, and he was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains along with many others. Three times people were deported from Jerusalem to Babylon, with the final destruction of the city being the most severe. The Babylonians were known for their cruelty, often using fear tactics like stacking skulls in public squares to maintain control.

WHEN GOD SAYS, "ENOUGH!"

For generations from Noah to Jeremiah, the people had turned away from the Lord. To make things worse, they didn't learn anything from what happened to the northern ten tribes of Israel when they became more involved in idol worship. Judah's sin was worse because they saw what happened to Israel, yet they still forgot about God. God decided He had seen enough. That's when He chose Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of judgment to punish His people. Even though Nebuchadnezzar didn't know it,

he unintentionally served God's purposes by attacking Jerusalem, destroying the temple, ransacking the city, and taking thousands of Jews into captivity.

All of these things led to Jeremiah 29. God called His people to holiness. But they ignored His call and went their own way. God warned them over and over again of coming judgment. He sent prophet after prophet but the people didn't pay attention.

THE JUDGMENT

The captivity of the Jews raised theological questions. Where was God in all of this? How could He have allowed the temple in Jerusalem, His earthly dwelling place, to be destroyed? How could He use the Babylonians to punish the Jews when the Babylonians were 100 times worse than the Jews? The simple answer is this: The problem isn't God not doing what we want; it is us not doing what God wants. When that happens, judgment is not far away.

THE WORST WOUNDS

Sometimes, in life, we learn it the hard way. The worst wounds are the ones we cause ourselves. There's no pain like the pain of making a stupid mistake, saying something we shouldn't, hurting the people we care about the most, breaking their trust, going against what we know is right, doing the wrong thing again and again, saying "I'm sorry" and then doing it again, promising to do better but doing worse, failing to live up to our own standards, disappointing those who depended on us.

That's the sharp pain that stops us from sleeping, that makes us toss and turn. That's the wave of guilt that makes us sad and feel like we messed up everything. I can't think of a worse pain than seeing what could have been and knowing it's your fault, and it's all broken. And that's exactly how the Jews felt in Babylon - rejected, humiliated, stuck, judged, condemned, forgotten. They had become a joke to other countries, just like the prophets said would happen. In this very sad situation, we get to Jeremiah 29. Jeremiah wrote a letter from Jerusalem to cheer up the Jews living in Babylon. His letter turned out to be a message from God to his people.

God is the one responsible for sending them to Babylon. Everything God is going to say depends on understanding that one big truth. Why were they punished? Because they sinned. Who took them away? The Babylonians. Who sent them to Babylon? God did.

The Babylonians believed they were acting on their own. They didn't know they were doing what God wanted. In Jeremiah 25:8, God called Nebuchadnezzar "my servant." Jeremiah 25:8 - "8 Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, 9 I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin (NIV)." At that time, Nebuchadnezzar didn't follow the God of the Bible. He worshiped his own gods. But God says, "It doesn't matter. He's still my servant."

God said in Jeremiah 29:4 - "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon... (NIV)" King James Version says, "whom I have caused to be carried away".

There is a warning and a ray of hope in these words. God will not be mocked. If you sin, there will be consequences. Sometimes, God will allow your enemies to bring you down. That's the warning. But here's the good news: Even when His children mess up, God doesn't forget them. The Jews grew up learning that God lived in the temple in Jerusalem. They were told, "If you want to find God, go to the temple and worship him there." But now, they were far away from home, in a place where people worshiped other gods. They were cut off from their past, and most of them knew they'd never go back to Jerusalem. Plus, even if they did, the temple was destroyed.

Into that suffering, God speaks a word of hope. God says to his hurting children, "I have not left you, not even for a second. I said I would punish you, and I did. But I haven't abandoned my own people, and I never will." The Jews ended up in Babylon because that's where they had to be. Their rebellion was so deep that they had to leave Judah to stop sinning. It was like needing a big operation to remove the cancer of idolatry.

We could think of their time in Babylon, even though it was painful, as a very tough kind of mercy from God. There was no other way to make them pay attention. But God gave a great promise to His children. Jeremiah 24:6-7 - "6 My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. 7 I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart." (NIV)

It's as if God is saying, "You think I hate you, but I don't. I have a wonderful plan for you, and that wonderful plan begins in Babylon." Now let's connect that to Jeremiah 29:11 - "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 (NIV)." Do you now get the true meaning of Jeremiah 29:11? The disciplining and punishment didn't seem so wonderful at that moment, but it was. It is better to be in the will of God in Babylon than to be out of the will of God in Jerusalem. In other words, It's better to be in the will of God even when facing trials in life, than to have all the successes in life but be outside of His will.

What do you do when you don't like how things are going in your life, and it seems like they won't get better soon? God doesn't look at your situation the way you do. You might not like where you are, wishing you were somewhere else doing something different. And maybe you're in a tough spot or in a bad place because of some choices you made. But then God says, "You are where you are because I wanted you to be there." That's the whole point of the story. You are where you are because God wanted you to be there.

Do you know the 'what if' syndrome? "What if I pursued this?" "I could have done better." "What if I didn't leave?" "My life wouldn't be such a mess." Listen, Not one incident that happened in your life, even the bad ones, is a waste. You are right where God wants you to be. (He) God is in control and will use your accident to be God's appointment.

If you are in Babylon right now, what you desperately need is TRUTH applied. You need a reason to have hope for the future. I love what Pastor Edmund Chan said: Truth doesn't change lives. It is truth applied that changes our lives. Be encouraged, child of God. If you feel like you're stuck, you're not. God wants you to realize that you can still worship Him, even when things are tough.