

# LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever had an enemy who ended up helping you in some way? What happened?
- 2 How can knowing that God is in control help us deal with difficult people better?
- 3 What can you do to view difficult people as chances to grow instead of just problems?

## 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.

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# SUNDAY WORD

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## THE TRUTH PART 3 USING OUR ENEMIES FOR OUR GOOD

TEXT: Jeremiah 29:7, "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 (NIV)."

One of the hardest commands in the Bible to obey is the command of Jesus in Luke 6:27 - "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you (NIV)." It is hard because prayer is the last thing we want to do for our enemies. Usually, we feel like doing things to get back at them or make them suffer as we have. Praying for our enemies feels impossible. But God says to do it anyway.

The Hebrew word for peace appears three times in this verse. Peace means blessing, wholeness, completeness, the absence of conflict, and prosperity. Here's the surprising part—especially for the Jewish exiles: God connects their blessing to the blessing of the Babylonians. This seems weird because the exiles were God's people and the Babylonians were pagans. God is saying they were better off in Babylon, and Babylon was better off because they were there. This is like Jesus' teaching for believers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

This is one tough act to follow. Whenever people mistreat us, we have three choices: 1. We can hate them completely. That doesn't help. 2. We can try to control our anger. That will wear us out emotionally. 3. We can pray for God to bless them. That allows God to bless us too. With this, Jeremiah 29:7 raises some questions we need to consider about our enemies:

## WHERE DO MY ENEMIES COME FROM?

There are many reasons why people become our enemies, and they often come from those closest to us. But when we look at it deeper, our enemies may come from God. He allows them into our lives for reasons we don't usually understand at the time. The story of Joseph and his brothers shows this. When his brothers threw him into a cistern and sold him to the Midianites, they only had evil in their hearts. When Potiphar's wife falsely accused him, it was out of injured pride. When he was jailed, no one could foresee that he would eventually become the Prime Minister of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Even Joseph didn't understand until years later, during the great famine, when his brothers came to him for help, not recognizing him. It was then that God's plan became clear. In Genesis 45, Joseph tells his brothers three times that God sent him to Egypt to eventually save his family and preserve a godly lineage. Later, Joseph sums up his understanding of God's sovereignty with the famous words in Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good (NIV)." Only someone who deeply believes in God's sovereign control could say this after so much suffering.

In the same way, the Babylonians intended to conquer and shame the Jews, but God meant it for good. And not just the good of the Jewish people but also the good of the Babylonians. So, where do your enemies come from? In a way, they come from God. If God didn't permit your enemies, they wouldn't be able to trouble you.

## WHO ARE MY ENEMIES?

An enemy is someone who goes against you. The dictionary says an enemy is "someone who hates, wants to harm, or opposes another person's interests." In fact, home is the first place to look for enemies. Jesus said in Matthew 10:36, "A man's enemies will be the members of his own household." (NIV) We can list those close relationships, like parent-child, husband-wife, and on to grandparents, uncles, aunts, and more distant relatives. It also includes people at work and those who attend church with us. We go home every day and face people who may or may not be happy to see us. Every week, we work with people who might not like us. We might even go to church and see people we'd rather avoid. If Jesus' teaching is to be effective, it must first work in our closest relationships.

God places people in every family who challenges us. I read somewhere these words: God uses family members to prepare us for leadership in the world. That's why your closest friends, strongest supporters, and biggest critics often come from your own family. You need to learn to deal with the people closest to you before you can impact the world around you. To be more specific: Your children could be your enemies. Your husband could be your enemy. Your wife could be your enemy. Your parents could be your enemies. But let us not limit our enemies at home. It could be in the office, in school, or even in church.

## DO WE HAVE TO CHOOSE?

We don't have to choose between loving our enemies and hoping they face the consequences or punishment. If we do our part by loving our enemies, God can handle judging them. In the meantime, we'll be blessed if we work for our enemies' prosperity and pray for God's blessings on them. If that sounds confusing, just remember this:

If we stay bitter, we can't get better. If we try to get even, we mostly hurt ourselves. If we try to punish our enemies, we're taking over God's role. But if we love, bless, and pray for them, things will improve for us and for them. We can sleep well, knowing that if they need punishment, God will handle it in His own way and time. That's the real message of Jeremiah 29:7.

## HOW ARE WE TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES?

We have to do good to them. Doing good to your enemies means looking past your pain and their unkindness to see their humanity. Believe it or not, your enemies were also made in the image of God. We should try to understand where they're coming from. Let us try to understand what's causing their behavior. "Doing good" means taking actions that promote your enemies' healing, despite how they've treated you. You make the call. You reach out. You close the gap.

Jesus said, Luke 6:28 - "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (NIV)." It means you choose not to think evil thoughts and you refuse to speak evil words against those who have wronged you. Proverbs talk a lot about how powerful words are. Proverbs 18:21 - "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit (NIV)." Whenever we speak, we either bring life or death. I've come to realize something important: Forgiveness often seems impossible because we won't stop talking. If we keep going over how others hurt us, we won't find the strength to forgive. At some point, we need to stop talking and start forgiving.

Your enemy is a gift from God to you. Even if you don't realize it, the person who hurt you deeply is a gift from God. Saying this doesn't excuse their bad actions or mistreatment. It means exactly what Joseph meant when he told his brothers, "You meant to harm me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Our enemies humble us, keep us praying, show our weaknesses, and remind us of how much we need God. Just as David needed King Saul to chase him and try to kill him, we need the enemies God sends us. If we didn't need them, He wouldn't send them. So, we thank God who knows what's best, and we try to love our enemies the best we can. Sometimes, God allows enemies to see if we truly want to be like Jesus. He keeps our enemies around as long as we need them.

Loving our enemies is hard. But I would rather die loving than die hating. When Jesus walks with us, we will find the strength to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who spitefully use us.

Don't get even with your enemies. Ask God to bless them instead. If you can let go of your anger long enough to pray like this, you will discover a wonderful benefit. When you pray for grace for others, you put yourself in a position to receive it yourself. So here's a new reason to pray for your enemies: Your blessing depends on their prosperity.

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