

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 How can focusing on the bigger picture of God's story help you cope with current troubles?
- 2 Have you ever felt discouraged or tempted to turn away from God due to personal suffering or world events? How did you handle those feelings? How did you perceive His concern and love during those times?
- 3 How can understanding God's larger plan help you maintain your faith during difficult times? What steps can you take to trust in God's plan, even when it's hard to understand?

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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TEXT: Jeremiah 29:10 - "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." (NIV)

WHEN WE TAKE GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR GRANTED

We've all heard that our Heavenly Father loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives. It's easy to agree when we like the plan. But what do you do when the plan isn't what you expected? When you face serious illness, the death of a loved one, marriage breakdown, job loss, failed relationships, failing grades, a failing business, or financial struggles, you cry out, "Lord, what's happening?"

The Jews had many experiences of God helping them. It happened when Moses led them out of Egypt, when God took care of them for 40 years in the wilderness, when they conquered the Promised Land, and so on. Over and over again, when the children of Israel found themselves in trouble when they were outnumbered and hopeless, God stepped in. It happened so often that the people came to believe that God would always be there no matter what.



Aren't we like that as children? We take our earthly father's blessings for granted, always thinking that even if we fail and get into trouble, our good father will help us out. We do the same with our Heavenly Father. The people of Israel said, "We are so blessed." But, any blessing neglected for too long will eventually be lost. This part of the story never seemed to stick with God's people. They enjoyed the blessings and privileges but never fully embraced the responsibility and warnings that came with them.

GOD HAS REASONS WE CAN'T SEE

The Israelites did not go through the easy way but the hard way. But, God has reasons we can't see. As we look back and think about all of this, we should ask, "How much did the Jews understand at the time?" The answer is that they likely only understood the first part—that God was punishing them for their sins. The rest was hidden from them. Over time, they would see that God chose to bless them during their exile, but they couldn't see God's longer-term plans.

This applies to all of us. We serve a God whose plans span generations. He doesn't follow our schedule or limit Himself to our limited understanding. This is a practical point for those who feel like they are in Babylon right now: Don't judge the end by the beginning. You can't see now what will come from your current troubles, and you might not fully understand even five, ten, or twenty years from now. Because God is God, (He) God doesn't work on our timetable, and He doesn't have to explain His plans in advance.

We are like ants crawling across a painting. As we crawl across a dark brown area, we think all of life is dark brown. Then we hit the green and think, "Oh, this is better. Now all is green." But soon we encounter dark blue, then yellow, then red. We keep moving from one color to another, never realizing that God is using all these colors to paint a masterpiece in our lives. One day we will see that every color has its place and purpose, and nothing is wasted. Just as there is a time and season for everything, there is a color for every stage of life's journey. When the painting is finished, we will realize that we were part of His masterpiece all along. Time is the canvas on which God paints, and eternity is the perspective from which we will see the beauty of His work.

Do you see God as your Father? Because if you do, you will look at God in a whole new way. The unfolding of God's plan over the years is all part of His story. It's so much bigger than us that we can't fully understand it. If we focus only on our current troubles, we may feel discouraged, confused, angry, frustrated, and depressed. We might doubt the Lord and feel tempted to turn away from Him. Many people have done just that. They have looked at their suffering and the pain in the world and lost their faith because of it. The pruning process that you're going through is His demonstration of concern and love for you.

This is the reality we live in. When we are in pain, we have two options: We can face our pain with God, or we can face our pain without God. If you can look past your own problems, just look up, and you will see the hand of God at work.

GOD'S PLAN

Jeremiah 29:10 - 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. (NIV)

This promise is clear and specific. It has a limit of 70 years. It has a location: Babylon. It depends on God's personal involvement: I will come to you. It flows from God's grace: Fulfill my good promise. It results in deliverance: I will bring you back. It ends where it started: To this place. Here's how we can understand God's message: "I haven't forgotten about you. I'll bring you back home. But not when you want. It'll take 70 years. Some will grow old and die in Babylon. But when I'm done with my plan, you'll go home."

God's plans and ours usually don't match up. We usually see life from our little perspective: what we want, what we think is best, what will make us happy, what we want for our kids, and so on. Those things aren't always bad. But even our best ideas aren't as important as God's plan, which covers everything and has been going on since before we were born, and will keep going until God is ready to finish it in the future.

GOD AS OUR FATHER

How do we see God as our Father? When we read the Old Testament, God often seems harsh and strict, giving severe punishments to teach people lessons. This can be hard to understand, especially when we think of God as loving and merciful. To see why God acts this way and what He is really like as a Father, we need to look more closely at the reasons behind His actions.

A key part of God's character is His holiness. God is perfectly holy and cannot accept sin. This is a main theme in the Old Testament, where the Israelites are often reminded to follow God's laws. When they don't, God's response is usually quick and strict. These actions show His dedication to justice. Sin has consequences, and God's punishments remind people of how serious disobedience is and the need to repent.

Even though God's actions can be severe, His discipline comes from love. Just like a loving parent corrects their child to teach them right from wrong, God disciplines His people to guide them back to the right path. Hebrews 12:5b-6 - "5...My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. 6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child." (NLT)

In the Old Testament, God's punishments often come with the goal of restoration. When the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, it was not just to punish them but to bring about a change of heart and lead them back to Him. This is evident in Jeremiah 29:11 where God says, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Even in their suffering, God had a plan for their ultimate good.

God, as a Father, is both fair and loving. He disciplines His children not out of cruelty but to bring them closer to Him and ensure their well-being. He loves deeply, corrects firmly, and redeems fully. By understanding this, we can better appreciate His character and the depth of His love for His people.

When God is your father, you're more than just forgiven; you're family. When God is your father, He will give you what is best for you. When God is your father, your future is secure. When God is your father, your identity is clear. When God is your father, no battle is fair against you. With Christ, God is on your side. This doesn't mean everything will always go your way, but it does mean that God will always give you what is best for you.