

Dec 12, 2015

Jeremiah 29:4-7

The Cornerstone Core: Outreach

Jonathan M. Romig

CornerstoneWestford.com

4 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 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.”

Outreach - We serve others and share the gospel.

- A. We need our Core Values to help us go someplace great.
 - a. Starting a church is like a road-trip: our Vision is the destination and our Mission is the roadmap.
 - b. Our Core Values are the camper, those things we need every day (coffee, gas, bed, friends, food).
 - c. We just need Community, Bible, Prayer, Love, Discipleship, and Outreach everyday.
 - d. When we arrive at the destination, we don't want to be exhausted or be bickering with each other.
 - e. When we arrive at our destination, we want to look more like Jesus—values help us follow him.

Introduction:

1. Have you ever been some place you didn't want to go?
2. Sometimes my family wanted to go to dog or stock shows in Colorado.
3. I was the sibling that didn't feel well enough to go or complained about it when I went.
4. When I got older I ended up working on a ranch and then for the Farm Credit Administration.
5. At the ranch, we spent all day outside in the cold mending fences and spraying weeds.
6. At the FCA, we spent all day inside at our desks reviewing loans to the farming community.
7. In all these places, I always found something to complain about.
8. Which tells me the problem wasn't in my circumstances, but my heart.
9. Maybe you have this same problem—you're not happy with where you live or work.
10. The cure to this heart-disease begins with realizing we have a God who puts us where he wants us.
11. The people of Israel had to learn this lesson when God sent them into captivity in Babylon.
12. In 597 BC, the Babylonians took the king of Judah and the Artisans into exile (upper class).

II. God takes his people where he wants them. (**Read v. 4**)

- A. God takes his people where he wants them.
 - a. The prophet Jeremiah is writing a letter to the Jewish leaders in exile in Babylon (500-900 miles).
 - b. False prophets are telling them to rebel and that they'll be home soon (Jer 5:31, 28:1-4).
 - c. God twice says “I carried you into exile” (v. 4, 7) because this is his plan.
 - d. There were a lot of awful practices for captives, but God spared them the worst.
 - e. The “Lord Almighty” is “Lord of hosts” (ESV)—God who rules deities and armies.
 - f. He is also the “God of Israel”, the God of his people, and has not abandoned them.
- B. There's been a lot of controversy in the news about the Syrian refugees.
 - a. 31 U.S. states are currently not accepting Syrian refugees, including Massachusetts.

- b. In Deuteronomy 10:19, God told the Hebrews after they left Egypt, “And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” (NIV)
- c. In the NT, we see the Greek word “philoxenia” which means “love or friend of foreigner.”
- d. Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to show **hospitality to strangers**, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (NIV)
- e. When we’re tempted to fear or hate refugees, remember God’s people have a history of exile.
- f. Next time you hear this conversation come up, say something positive about Syrian refugees.

(God takes his people where he wants them.)

(God has brought us here.)

III. God has brought us here to bless the city. (**Read v. 5-6**)

A. God has brought us here to plant a garden. (v. 5)

- a. Everyone I know who has built their own house and lived in it has taken years to do so.
- b. In American, you get a construction loan and finish up in a year or two.
- c. When I visited Croatia, people built as they could afford it, so they lived in half-finished houses.
- d. They passed these homes from family members to family members.
- e. When God says, “Build houses” he’s saying settle down, work hard, stay put.
- f. When he says “plant gardens and eat their fruit” he’s saying invest longterm.
- g. You don’t plant seeds and walk away—you pull weeds, plant, water, and weed some more.
- h. We just purchased a “purple reign light” so Monica could start her gardening early, it takes time.
- i. A garden nourishes the body (fruit) but it also nourishes the soul (flowers).
- j. God brought the Israelites to Babylon to plant a garden, and he’s calling us to do the same.

(Plant the garden of God in the city of man.)

B. I once visited the Denver Botanical Gardens.

- a. It’s not just one garden, it’s full of lots of gardens.
- b. The **tropical conservatory** is inside and is like a rainforest with chocolate, coffee, and bananas.
- c. The **crossroads garden** is drier and has yucca and agave plants.
- d. The **dwarf conifer** garden has lots of trees of different shapes and sizes.
- e. The one I remember from my childhood is the **Japanese Garden** with its koi pond and Bonsai.
- f. God’s calling us to till a spiritual garden in Westford.
- g. Our garden is going to look different than one in Chelmsford or Acton.
- h. He’s also calling us to plant gardens where he has us.
- i. Your workplace garden looks different than my workplace garden.
- j. The question is, are you planting, are you working the ground?

(Plant the garden of God in the city of man.)

C. God has brought us here to grow a family. (v. 6)

- 1. There are eleven commands (imperatives) in verses 5-7:
 - a) Verse 5 is environmental—Build! Settle! Plant! Eat!
 - b) Verse 6 is relational—Marry! Have children! Find wives! Give daughters! Increase!
 - c) Verse 7 is physical and spiritual—Seek peace! Pray!

2. The one with the most commands is the relational or family category.
3. In order for the Israelites to invest in Babylon, they need to invest their families.
4. They already lost their land and now God is asking them to give up their children.
5. Verse 10 tells us the Jews were going to be exiled 70 years or three generations.
6. God had plans to not kill the Israelites, but grow and bless them, but they had to trust God fully.
7. The stories of Esther and Daniel are stories of God blessing his people in captivity.
8. Are you willing to invest your family in what God is doing here?
9. I don't know if your grandkids are going to grow up in Westford.
10. I do know God wants you fully invested in his ministry where he's called you.

(Plant the garden of God in the city of man.)

(BTW: If any of you parents with grown kids are looking for a Biblical mandate for your married children to hurry up and give you grandkids, see verse 6.)

(God has brought us here to bless the city.)

IV. We bless the city physically and spiritually. (**Read v. 7**)

- A. We care for the physical wellbeing of our city.
 1. "Peace and prosperity" is really one word in the Hebrew, the word "Shalom".
 2. The peace here is not just a lack of war, but is wellbeing, safety, and completeness.
 3. In the early years, God called a man named Gideon to fight Israel's oppressors, the Midianites.
 4. God appeared as an angel of light and tells Gideon to fight, but he doubts.
 5. "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest... and I am the least in my family." (Jdg 6:15b)
 6. So Gideon prepares an offering that God consumes with fire.
 7. Gideon exclaims how he's seen God "face to face" and he builds an altar, "The Lord is peace".
 8. God delivers Israel and grants them peace for forty years.
 9. We want "The Lord is peace" to give our city long and lasting peace.
 10. We care for the physical wellbeing (or "shalom") of our city.

- B. Are we bringing "The Lord is peace" to Westford?
 1. Do we care if Westford, Massachusetts, and New England are at peace?
 2. In 2014, 325 people died from heroin in NH and in MA opioid deaths rose 20%.
 3. Timothy Keller asks an interesting question, "If you or your church disappeared tonight, would the community around you notice?" (Romans 8-16 For You Pg 143)
 4. We did the Trunk or Treat and Parent's Night out and I'm looking forward to what's next.
 5. We care for the physical wellbeing of our city.

(Our Outreach Core Value says, "We serve others and share the gospel.")

(If we take care of people physically, but don't care about their souls, we do half the job.)

- C. We care for the spiritual wellbeing of our city.
 1. Notice God tells the exiles to "Pray to the Lord for it."
 2. When I'm in a situation I don't like, I pray to get out of it asap.
 3. God doesn't have them pray against the city, but for its benefit.
 4. The OT translates this word for pray as "to plead, to intercede, to judge, and to expect."
 5. God is saying to get down on your knees and plead for the city.

- D. We pray that the city—our town Westford—will come to know Jesus as its savior.
1. In 2012 my wife and I surveyed Westford and found about 12% of 21K go to church.
 2. We found that only about 2% have a clear relationship with Jesus.
 3. If that doesn't break your heart, I don't know what will.
 4. We're not called to go out and make conversions, but we are called to care.
 5. Romans 5:1b says, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

(We bless the city physically and spiritually.)
(Plant the garden of God in the city of man.)

- E. 5 Ways to Apply:
- 1) Get to know your city (Chelmsford Christmas tree lighting. Watch me! [Festival of Trees](#)).
 - 2) Get to know your neighbors (We're giving Christmas Snapfish pics to our neighbors.).
 - 3) Serve the city (talk with Shirley Burchfield about joining the Outreach team).
 - 4) Invite your pastor to your **frontline** (God has put you where you are for a reason).
 - 5) Invite one of your **Top Ten Most Wanted** to church (Big Day or our Christmas Eve).

(Plant the garden of God in the city of man.)
(I want to close by telling you a story.)

Conclusion:

1. There was once a king that sent his son to a far away land to find a foreign bride.
2. The Son met a local girl who wasn't very much like a "princess" or a "queen."
3. She was an a prostitute, drawn to lusts and indebted to the men of the land.
4. The prince saw her beauty, so he gathered all the treasures of his kingdom, and paid her debt.
5. He took his own white robes and made her a wedding dress, preparing her to meet his father the king.
6. When the woman saw the son's great love, it changed her, and she loved him back.
7. When the son and his bride came home, the king was so pleased he threw a party for the whole kingdom.
8. He took his son and his bride and crowned them king and queen forever.
9. You and I are the bride of Christ—he left heaven and came into exile to rescue you and me.
10. He has paid our debt on the cross and clothed us with his royal righteousness.
11. Now you and I are to go and do likewise, inviting foreigners to come home.
12. Plant the garden of God in the city of man.

Benediction: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.* 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 (NIV)