

FLOURISHING IN GRAD SCHOOL WEEK 3: CHOOSE TO BE HERE

"Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays the most or fasts the most; it is not he who gives alms the most or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God wills, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness and has a heart always ready to praise God for it."

- William Law

JEREMIAH 29: 1 - 14

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

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." ⁸ Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD.

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. 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. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Read the passage out loud together. Give everyone five or so minutes on their own to review it. Invite study members to note things that stand out and add a comment or question about it on their sheet.

Discussion Questions

How does this text get identified in the first three verses?

Who are the recipients of this letter? Where are they?

Reading between the lines in verses 8 - 10, why does God send this message to the exiles in Babylon?

What are his instructions in light of this (see verses 5 - 7)? How might you describe these in a word or two?

Thinking about your own experience in a new place, how have you begun to invest yourself here? What decisions do you need to make in order to be fully invested while you're in school? (Have you finished unpacking? Are the boxes put away? Have you hung pictures on your walls yet?)

How different has the adjustment to grad school been from that of your freshman year of undergrad?

How can this group help you settle in? How can we support one another along the way?

Jeremiah encourages the people to increase in number. Perhaps the idea of increasing can serve as a helpful metaphor. There is often a feeling of getting "smaller" in grad school — of becoming less interesting or "decreasing" into little more than practitioners of a particular discipline. What would it look like to "increase" this year? What hobbies or interests would you like to hold onto? What else would you like to be known for? What can you do to help others "increase"?

How do you see God's sovereignty and his care for his people in this text? (Compare the end of verse 1 with verse 4. Also note verses 10 - 14.)

God's provision is promised and he wants his people to rest in his faithfulness. How hard is this for you? What does it mean to seek the Lord with your whole heart?

Are there other things from the passage you want to comment on or ask about?

In verse 7, "peace and prosperity" is the translation of the Hebrew word *shalom*. This rich word means more than just absence of conflict. It speaks to wholeness — a flourishing — of body, soul, and mind. Spend a few minutes filling in the table below. Discuss this final question together and then pray for one another and for this group. How might you seek peace and prosperity in your department? How can you be praying for the faculty?

<i>How might you seek peace and prosperity in your department?</i>	<i>Who among the faculty could you be praying for and how?</i>