

Small Group Guide

Based on Jeremiah 21-24: Exile, Hope, and the Righteous Branch

Before You Meet

Encourage group members to read Jeremiah 21-24 before gathering. **Ask them to come prepared to share one thing that stood out to them from the passage.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. God will not share his place in our hearts with other gods, whether those gods are leaders, institutions, traditions, or personal ambitions.
 2. The good figs in Jeremiah 24 remind us that God's favor does not always look the way we expect it to.
 3. God's discipline is always redemptive in intent. He does not scatter his people without a plan to gather them again.
 4. We are all spiritual exiles in this world. The deep homesickness we feel is not a flaw. It is a compass pointing us toward God.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Digging In

1. The people of Judah placed their hope in external factors like ethnicity, the temple, the priesthood, the kingship, etc. Pastor Nick said, "We humans tend to hope in things that can not carry hope." What are some things that we can be tempted to put our hope in besides God?
2. The vision of the good figs and bad figs in Jeremiah 24 is an inversion of what the people expected. Those taken into exile were the favored ones. Those who remained assumed they were blessed simply because they stayed. Have you ever assumed God's favor based on outward circumstances, only to discover you had it backwards? What did that teach you?
3. Pastor Nick referenced the story of David and Nathan and noted that David was blind to his own sin.
 - a. Pastor Nick asked, "Do we have someone like that in our lives that we trust, that is willing to say hard things to us when we need to hear them?" Do you have a Nathan in your life? What are some things that keep us blind from our own sin?

4. Pastor Nick posed this self-reflective question: "Are my efforts to genuinely please God, or am I just trying really hard to fit him in with the other things in my life?" How would you honestly answer that question right now?

Connecting to Our Lives

1. God condemned the shepherds of Judah for scattering and neglecting the flock rather than protecting the weak and bringing justice to the evildoer. How does this standard challenge the way we think about leadership in the church, in our families, and in our communities?
2. Pastor Nick described a German concept roughly translated as "unhomeliness," a deep sense of not being at home in the world. How has faith in Jesus addressed it, or how are you still wrestling with it?
3. Pastor Nick said, "God is not interested in building a powerful empire in the nation of Israel, or in our case, a beautiful church with lots of money and people, if we are not interested in placing him at the very center of it." What are some ways a church or ministry can drift from keeping God at the center while still looking successful from the outside? How do we guard against that?
4. Pastor Nick asked, "Why do the things that should make me tremble make me yawn? Why do the things that should make me rejoice make me shrug?" What causes us to lose the sense of wonder? What has helped you recover it.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or two of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

1. **FIND YOUR NATHAN:** Identify one person in your life who has earned the right to speak honestly into your blind spots. If you do not have someone like that, begin praying for and pursuing that kind of relationship. Consider reaching out to someone this week to begin building that trust.
2. **SIT WITH THE HOMESICKNESS:** Rather than pushing away the feeling that this world is not quite right or that something is missing, sit with it this week. Journal about what you are longing for. Let it point you toward God rather than toward a substitute. Share what you discover with your group.
3. **PRAY FOR YOUR LEADERS:** In light of Pastor Nick's emphasis on the weight of leadership and the failure of Judah's kings, spend intentional time this week praying for those in authority over you, whether in your church, your family, your workplace, or your government. Pray that they would fear God more than man.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying as a group. Be sensitive to topics that came up during discussion.

