

# THE JEREMIAH 29 INITIATIVE

## **BUILD. PLANT. PRAY.**

Going through a pandemic can be discouraging. Some have become sick. Others have lost loved ones and friends. The pandemic has impacted everyone in some way—the way we work, go to school, and even how we worship. Some have not been in church since March. There is disruption, frustration, and confusion about what to do next.

I was talking the other day with Dr. Kelton Hinton, a friend who works with Southern Baptist churches in North Carolina, and he said, “You know this is not the first time the people of God have been in a situation like this.” He mentioned the Jewish exile in Babylon. He noted that those people had their lives turned upside down and were cut off from worshipping at the Temple, but God used the process to refine them, and He was with them wherever they went. Find his paper at [nafwb.org/Jeremiah29](http://nafwb.org/Jeremiah29).

Since they were unable to offer sacrifices at the Temple, they formed synagogues where they could study God’s word together and pray. They began to concentrate more on family. They received guidance from the prophet Jeremiah which I will paraphrase. He told them to build houses and dwell in them; to plant gardens and eat the fruit of them; to get married and encourage sons and daughters to get married and have children so they would increase and not diminish. Then he instructed them to seek the peace of their exile city and to pray the Lord for it: for in the peace they would have peace.

These words God gave the exiles can help us. They could not worship as they had previously. Eventually, their Temple was destroyed, and many of them were taken to a faraway land. Many of us are in situations where we cannot worship or come together for church as we have previously. Though our situation is not anything as bad as the exiles, we can learn from them.

Some of their people were frustrated. They expected everything to get back to normal soon. They were looking for the exile to end quickly. Similarly, it is normal for us to wish for the pandemic to end quickly, so we can get back to life as it was before. However, it appears this event will continue to have an impact upon our lives for some time, which is where we can get guidance from Jeremiah 29.

Jeremiah essentially told the exiles to settle down and not look for a quick end to the crisis. He encouraged them to “go on offense” and to **Build, Plant, and Pray**.

## Build

*5 Build ye houses, and dwell in them;*

Get busy doing your work. Building a life. "Dwell in them." Dwell in these houses and enjoy that life. In our situation, this would be to get busy with our lives and ministry, taking precautions but not waiting for the pandemic to end.

## Plant

*"And plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;"*

To plant is to invest. When you plant, you assume you or someone else will be around later to eat the fruit. They exiles were to do things that would benefit later.

*6 Take ye wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished.*

In other words, "Don't lose sight of your family in the exile." Build or develop your children. Encourage them to get married and have children. Plant strong families.

## Pray

*7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.*

Babylon was often hostile toward the faith of the exiles, and the Babylonians engaged in some terrible acts. Rather than disparage the Babylonians or conspire against them, they were to pray for them. They were to try to help them and to seek peace. The well-being of the exiles was tied to the well-being of their community.

At the NAFWB General Board meeting a few weeks ago, Free Will Baptists adopted the **3 for 30 Plan** for this decade. The plan is to **Reach, Train, and Give**. Reach our community, train our people, and give our talents and treasure to further the gospel. You will hear more about that later.

Over the last few days, we have had conversations with many leaders, and we believe this is a critical time. Perhaps the first initiative of the 3 for 30 Plan should be the Jeremiah 29 Initiative to reach our neighborhoods; train ourselves, families, and churches; and to reach our communities by praying for them and giving to them to help them find peace.

## How can we build and plant right now?

Even though we went a long time without any sports and distractions, research indicates that Bible read-

ing has actually gone down in the pandemic. If we are going to reach others, we must begin by building ourselves into people who know and apply the Bible to our own lives. We must plant the Scripture in our hearts so we can be transformed into instruments God can use.

So, as part of the Jeremiah 29 initiative, we are asking every person to spend at least some time (preferably 15 minutes) reading the Bible every day. When you read, we ask you to ask yourself these questions:

- + **What did this passage mean to the people who received it the first time?**
- + **What is the timeless principle?**
- + **What does the passage teach you about God?**
- + **What do you need to do based on the passage?**

If we do this, we will be transformed. If you go to [nafwb.org/jeremiah29](http://nafwb.org/jeremiah29), you will find a bookmark with those questions. It is a simple reminder to try to apply the Word. You will also find some Bible reading plans, as well as a link to the Randall House App that provides valuable resources in this area. **We don't care how you do it; just please read your Bible.** This would make a good churchwide campaign for the month of September. Think of how encouraging it would be for a pastor to have 90 to 95% of their congregation pledge to read the Bible every day.

Along the same line, I believe it is critical to get Sunday School classes, life groups and other small groups meeting if they are not doing so already. This is key to building and planting. Though the groups may be smaller, meet at a park or house instead of church, meet on Saturday or some other day than Sunday, or ever meet online (you get the picture), these groups are critical to building and planting. As more people get into the Word, it may be that more people begin to teach the Word. With social distancing, smaller classes or groups are more desirable so please get into the Word and pass it on to others.

## Pray

In October, we will challenge our people to pray 15 minutes a day. This is a great time to pray for your neighbors, as Jeremiah 29:7 instructed. Pray for the nation, the upcoming election, and your pastor. Remember, October is pastor appreciation month. Tell your pastor you are praying for him. How encouraging for a pastor to learn that 90% of his people have committed to pray daily! Download a prayer journal at [nafwb.org/prayerjournal](http://nafwb.org/prayerjournal). We encourage you to pray for your community. Consider walking through or driving through your neighborhood and praying for your people.

In November, we will ask people to commit to spiritual conversations with their family. This coincides well with Thanksgiving. Just as Jeremiah instructed the exiles not to lose sight of their families during exile, we also must not lose sight of our families during the pandemic. The pandemic has provided *more* fam-

ily time. Let's identify that as a gift from God—a time to plant that will enable our family to survive the storms of life. Let's read Scripture together, pray together, and even minister together. Sometimes, when we think of family time in the Word, we make it too complicated. This could be as simple as reading Psalm 1 before a meal, praying, and then talking about how to apply the passage during dinner.

Make use of the many resources Randall House has provided for family faith conversations. They recently launched a family-centered curriculum called EveryDay curriculum, which includes an app and other vital tools to help start and continue spiritual conversations with your children. Visit [d6family.com](https://d6family.com) to learn more. Pastors, Randall House will even mail this curriculum directly to the families in your church! I encourage you to take advantage of these resources. Will you commit to helping your family?

Where will we be in December? We may not be able to host some of the outreach activities we have enjoyed in the past. I've already heard about New Year's Eve fireworks celebrations being canceled. But we still need to reach out.

The Lord said specifically to pray for peace in the land. It may be that some of you feel called to go a step further. Dr. Hinton suggested you might become a neighborhood "outpost." During the pandemic, some churches in his area created family-centered outreach, often a husband and wife and children who walked through the neighborhood and checked on people to make sure they were okay. I think this is the spirit of what Jeremiah was getting at in this passage. Perhaps this might even lead to an opportunity for neighborhood Bible studies. Feel free to use some of the memes at [nafwb.org/jeremiah29](https://nafwb.org/jeremiah29) as a means to discuss an issue and read Scripture.

Usually when we think of Jeremiah 29 people mention verse 11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." That was meant for these exiles, and God was saying, this bad thing that has happened is actually for your good. Perhaps this too is for our good.

Yes, this is a very discouraging time, and many things are outside of our control. But we can control how often we read the Bible and pray to the Lord! Those are things we can do, no matter what happens in the future.

Yes, everyone is a bit frustrated and confused. This allows us to focus on our family and build something that will last. Perhaps our neighborhoods are more receptive to the gospel than previously. Let's pray for them to have peace and do what we can to point them to the gospel.

**Build, plant, and pray.** It worked for those exiled to Babylon. Let's make it work in the current pandemic.

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INITIATIVE

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