

## STUDY GUIDE:

### Are We there Yet? | Restoration: We aren't there yet

This week we review what we have learned and realize that we still are in exile. We aren't there yet.

## INTRODUCTION

What do the Westborough Baptist Church (which holds offensive protests at soldier's memorial services), churches with bowling alleys ("At Trinity Lutheran we are blessed with 4 lanes of classic bowling in our basement!"), and churches that hold Saturday or Sunday night services so families can attend soccer games on Sunday morning, all have in common? Their actions are responses to the culture they live in and represent the three common responses that churches in America have practiced in the last fifty years. As society changed and became less like the culture within the church, Christians responded by fighting the culture, fortifying or withdrawing from the culture, or accommodating to it.

First of all, not all responses to culture are bad. Our own church and denomination has likely practiced versions of all three. Other examples of all three can be sighted.

**Fighting:** Long before Westborough Baptist began picketing churches and memorial services, the Moral Majority fought against the culture in the voting booth.

**Withdrawal or fortification:** Churches with bowling alleys, harvest parties (instead of trick-or-treating), and even extremes of selling positions and expecting Jesus to return, as did Jim Jones and Jonestown.

**Accommodation:** adjusting worship service hours, adding drums and guitars to traditional services and developing contemporary services, the ordination of women and the consideration of ordaining gays.

A fourth response to changing culture and society is both ancient and modern – **exile**. This response acknowledges that the culture we live in is different from us, that we need to live in it, but also witness to it. We are not to fear it for God is in charge. One of the most beloved Bible verses is Jeremiah 29:11, "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." What many people don't realize is that this promise is made to believers in exile. A few verses earlier, the Lord's word to them is, 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." The people are told to live in exile. They are also told to 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."

Like the Apostle Paul, we have not yet arrived. We live in exile, strangers in a strange land. He challenges us to know Christ in Phil 3, admits that he has not achieved that goal and then says, 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

### **CHAT**

In churches you have attended, how have you experienced fight, withdrawal, accommodation and exile?

### **READ & DISCUSS**

Jeremiah 29:4-9

*“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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. 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.”*

Discussion questions:

What does this instruction of the Lord look like in our setting today? How does this relate to your job or career or lifestyle?

Discuss your own answers to these questions or common answers you have heard, “What is my Salvation actually FOR?” Is it only about personal atonement, about getting to heaven, or is there something that comes later, after I’m saved? Is it just to have a “friend in Jesus?”

### **CLOSE IN PRAYER FOR ONE ANOTHER**

