2.28.10 – Jeremiah 29: 4 – 7 // Being a Church for the City

Materials Needed: A piece of paper for each child. Crayons/markers/other drawing tools.

Opening Activity

[Refer to the *Wrapping Up* section of this guide before you explain this activity to be sure you understand it from beginning to end.] Have the kids draw a picture of their neighborhood or the street where they live. Ask them to draw pictures of the people who live there and the activities they enjoy doing while there. (They can include their own homes, but make sure they include their neighbors' homes, community centers (if applicable), parks, stores, and activities they enjoy doing there.)

Discussion

Tonight we're going to talk about how God wants us to love the city where we live, and how he's even given us instructions for doing it. Pretty neat, huh? The pictures that we've drawn will help each of us figure out how to begin loving our own neighborhood or street well for Jesus. Hold on to them and we'll revisit them at the end of our discussion tonight.

Let's dive into tonight's passage to begin.

Read Jeremiah 29:4-7

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

This passage of scripture occurs not long after God exiled the people of Jerusalem and other neighboring nations to Babylon for 70 years. God exiled them, or sent them out of their country and didn't allow them to go back, because these people and their ancestors (moms, dads, grandparents, etc.) continually disobeyed God over and over again. God even used Jeremiah, His prophet, to speak God's truth to them, but they continued to ignore God and worship idols they had created instead of the one true God who loves them.

When we arrive at tonight's passage in the 29th chapter of Jeremiah, we are presented with a letter that Jeremiah writes to the people in exile to tell them how God desires for them to live while in Babylon.

Question One: How do God's instructions to the Israelites in this passage relate to us? We haven't been exiled to a foreign land. We live in the United States of America, where we have all kinds of freedoms and luxuries. *But even though our physical homes are in the USA, in the Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill area of North Carolina, as followers of Jesus, our eternal home is not earth; it's in God's kingdom, in heaven, and it could be easy to convince ourselves that our lives on earth don't matter, and we'll just wait until we get to heaven. But that's not the case! Just like the exiles, God reminds us that He has created us to live in the world to make His name great and to do everything in a way that brings honor and glory to Him while we're here on earth. Therefore, it's important that we take root in the city where we live NOW, not tomorrow or when we grow up! We must help our parents establish a loving home for our family to honor Jesus, work hard for God's glory in everything we do, and one day get married and have children of our own so that our earthly legacy, or things and people we leave behind when we die, will continue to make Jesus' eternal legacy known to future generations (our children and our children's children)!*

Question Two: Looking at verse 7, do you know what the word *welfare* means? *In this context it means the health, happiness and prosperity of a person's life – but not the kind we seek for ourselves… instead it's the kind that can only happen when everybody is truly relying on God!*

When we look back at verse 7 all together, we see that God was telling the people to work for the health, happiness and prosperity of the people in their city by having them rely fully on Him. God calls us to do the same thing for the people in our city!

Question Three: How do we begin to work for the God-centered health, happiness and prosperity (welfare) of the people in our city? *It begins with prayer. We must pray to the Lord on the city's behalf as the passage indicates. This means that we say prayers to the Lord for the people in our city and about them. They may not even be praying. They may not even know God at all, but we pray for them just the same because we have confidence through Jesus' grace alone that they may receive mercy and find the grace they need through Him (Hebrews 4:16).*

Learning to pray and knowing what to pray for only increases as we grow to know Jesus more and more. As we learn more about Jesus, we see that He has always been concerned with the needs of people, both spiritual needs and physical ones too. That's why He came to Earth and took on the sins of the whole world, yours and mine included, to renew our broken souls and to bring us back into God's family, so that we can be heirs of His kingdom, share this message with others, and finally spend eternity with Him! So, when we look to our city and try to figure out what to pray for, we can look at Jesus' life and see how He interacted with people and how He healed them through and through to get an idea of what we should be praying for as well.

Question Four: From our study of Mark, do you remember the ways in which Jesus interacted with and healed the people around him? Allow the kids to share what they remember from their study of Mark. Then, read through the following: *He shared the Good News of the gospel with them. He held the hand of those who were sick and healed them. He prayed to his Father for wisdom and guidance and for the people around him. He cast out evil spirits. He was moved with pity and healed a man with a terrible skin disease. He healed a man who couldn't walk and another who was blind. He forgave people. He taught crowds of people. Jesus attended dinner parties with people who needed to know about His love for them. He contradicted culture. He healed a man with a deformed hand. Sick people flocked to him. He encountered adversity. He told stories to help people understand the truth about His gospel. He calmed storms and saved his disciples. He demonstrated His power over Satan. He healed a bleeding woman, increased the faith of many and healed a little girl. He had compassion and fed lots of people with little food. He prayed. He calmed people's fears. He interacted with people who were "different" from him.*

Think about how you can interact with people in your city like Jesus did. Think about how you can pray for Jesus to heal the people in your city in the same way he healed them in the book of Mark. Imagine what we can do if we lived like this!

Wrapping Up

Our work doesn't stop with prayer though. God has uniquely placed us in the city where we live and around the people who live there for a purpose. As we pray for them, we need to get to know them too!

Let's get out the drawings of our neighborhoods and streets that we did earlier. Look at the people that you drew in your picture. Write their names on the paper. Then, sit down with your parents sometime this week and think of creative ways that will allow you to get to know your neighbors. Write these ideas on this paper. How will God use the friendships that you develop with them to bring glory to Jesus and make His name great? Remember, even before Jesus began to teach and heal, he too was a son and a brother who lived and worked in his city with purpose (Mark 6:3).

Close this time by praying for God to open doors of opportunity for you to get to know these people. Pray for them too and ask God to give you the courage and the wisdom to live the life he's called you to live for His glory.