



Expectant Exiles [Fall 2020 Strategy]

The current climate in 2020 has removed the possibility of things getting back to normal. Through numerous trials, the world has changed, but that doesn't have to be a negative reality. As believers, we must commit to offering hope now more than ever before. We cannot retreat into a spiritual quarantine, but we must position ourselves to be available as the world needs the gospel ever so desperately.

In order to do that, we must face reality about the state of the church. We cannot wait for a fictitious date when we flip a switch within the church, and everything returns to what it was before. That will not happen. Instead of hoping for a return to the old normal, let's rebuild for the new normal.

In the Book of Daniel, we see a group of friends who commit to the LORD and to one another to stay faithful to biblical values and missional mandates amid a pagan, rebellious culture. More than merely enduring exile in Babylon, these men changed the culture from within the midst of it. While they were exiles, they were still expectant of what God could do through that season.

The Strategy

As if this year has not had enough challenges, we still have the most volatile election on the horizon. Regardless of how it turns out, 50% of our country will be hostile the next day. We must prepare ourselves to live for Jesus no matter what the political or cultural landscape looks like in the months to come.

In normal years, we eagerly anticipate the beginning of school to kick off new groups and events scheduled on our church calendar. With continued anxiety regarding health and security, we know that there will never come a Sunday when everyone feels comfortable at the same time and where church looks and feels as it did before. The changes will be progressive rather than instantaneous.

Instead of losing a critical opportunity by pacing through another intermediate stage as a church, we want to create a strategy for the next three months of which our entire church can get behind. We want our whole church family of all ages to recommit, commit, or continue your connection with a Gospel Group in-person or online. Give that group your absolute best for three months. That's all we are asking.

For these three months, select if you would prefer an in-person group or an online group. We know that something could dramatically change in the middle of this time, but it is doubtful. Instead of waiting for that fictitious day, let's choose to make the best of this one. We will concern ourselves with 2021 when we get there, but right now, we must regroup to face the challenges ahead.

All groups will be going through the same study, and selecting a group now doesn't mean you can't rejoin another group later, but we think it is critical to connecting you with other believers right now. It really can't wait. The amount of stress everyone is feeling is dangerous to the soul. We need each other, and we need more than halfway commitment.

The Objectives

If you follow what happened to Daniel and his friends, you realize that they were following some marching orders. These young men were obeying Jeremiah 29. God had commanded His people regarding how to live when they were forced to sojourn in a culture that did not follow God. Taking these examples from God's Word, we want every group of every age to commit to these five objectives:

1. **Prioritize the weekly gathering** - Whether you choose an in-person group on campus or in a home, or you choose an online group, we want to ask you to prioritize that weekly time where you connect. The worst place you can be in these days is isolated, and your group needs you as much as you need the group.
2. **Commit to intentional checkups** - In between the weekly gathering, we want your group to come up with a plan for how you will checkup intentionally on each other. Don't let anyone slide. Follow up with prayer requests. Establish responsible connections to make sure everyone is involved. Commit to being the church to one another all week long.
3. **Strive for personal holiness** - When Daniel and his friends resolved not to defile themselves with the culture's offerings, they needed God's help and one another's accountability. Take these months to get honest with yourself about a temptation that you are giving into and fight like your life depends on it.
4. **Seek the city's welfare** - God's people were not against their cities of exile, but they were for them. We want each group to select one way that you can bless the city around you. Think of places where your group has a natural connection and a personal motivation, and come up with a plan to seek the city's welfare together.
5. **Bring a friend along** - Throughout the Book of Daniel, we discover that people were coming to faith due to the examples of these resolved followers. Within your group, seek out one person that one member has a natural connection with and is currently spiritually receptive. Allow the group to pray, strategize, invite, and include that person into the life of the group even before they have a relationship with the LORD. As you bring this person into the fray, watch how every member steps up in commitment as we grasp the spiritual need present.

The Study

During this 3-month group, all groups will be going through a study entitled "Good News for 2020." This curriculum will take us through the last weeks of Jesus, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. It will not only provide an excellent framework for us to be reminded of the gospel, but it will be a natural way to share the gospel with those you are blessing and befriending. It will provide natural outlets to share testimonies within the group time as well.

For those who have been in a group, we are continuing The Gospel Project curriculum, but God has sovereignly aligned these months with this portion of Scripture. We will keep pace with where we are, but we don't want people to think they are just jumping in the middle of a study and would be lost thematically.

The content and the strategy is the same for all ages. We want every single Gospel Group of every single age, starting with our preschoolers and going through our adults, thinking about how they can use this time for the glory of God and the good of others.

The Goal

We do not want to waste this moment. The state of the world has people on edge, and we have the greatest news of all. We cannot shrink back from telling it.

- The goal is to be faithful with this opportunity.
- The goal is to bless our city.
- The goal is to see people transformed by the gospel.
- The goal is to normalize this standard for our groups.
- The goal is to point people to Jesus during these days.

If we are experiencing exile-type days, we might as well be expectant throughout them. Will you join us?