

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

87. How to Thrive in Difficult Circumstances

You are listening to episode 87 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled How to Thrive in Difficult Circumstances. Welcome to the podcast! Thank you for joining me. Difficult circumstances. We all experience them. We wish we didn't, but we do. Maybe you're walking through some right now or know someone who is. In this episode we're looking at an account in the Bible of how God encouraged a group of people to thrive in their own difficult circumstances. We used this text as the basis for our Real Encouragement LIVE! event last week, and I thought it was so appropriate, I decided to highlight it in this week's episode. So, get ready to thrive, friend. We're going to find some timely encouragement for our hearts today. Let's get to it.

Life on earth is not always easy, right? We often experience difficult circumstances that are beyond our control. Sometimes these circumstances try to derail us or discourage us or drag us down into the dumps. But we want to not just survive these circumstances, we desire to thrive in and through them! Our encouragement today comes from how God instructed a certain group of people to thrive in their own difficult circumstances.

It's found in Jeremiah 29:4-14. Here, the prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to the people of Jerusalem who had been exiled to Babylon. In the NIRV version it reads:

The Lord who rules over all is the God of Israel. He speaks to all those he forced to go from Jerusalem to Babylon. He says, "Build houses and make your homes there. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Get married. Have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons. Give your daughters to be married. Then they too can have sons and daughters. Let there be many more of you and not fewer. Also work for the success of the city I have sent you to. Pray to the Lord for that city. If it succeeds, you too will enjoy success." The Lord who rules over all is the God of Israel. He says, "Do not let the prophets trick you. Do not be fooled by those who claim to have secret knowledge. Do not listen to people who try to explain their dreams to you. All of them are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," announces the Lord.

Verse 10 continues: *The Lord says, "You will be forced to live in Babylon for 70 years. After they are over, I will come to you. My good promise to you will come true. I will bring you back home. I know the plans I have for you," announces the Lord. "I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come. Then you will call out to me. You will come and pray to me. And I will listen to you. When you look for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be found by you," announces the Lord. "And I will bring you back from where you were taken as prisoners. I will gather you from all the nations. I will gather you from the places where I have forced you to go," announces the Lord. "I will bring you back to the place I sent you away from."*

Interesting instructions, aren't they?

In this text God instructs them how to thrive in their difficult circumstances.

So, God's people were taken captive and forced to go from their home, Jerusalem, to a foreign land, Babylon. At this time, the Babylonian Empire included much of the Middle East. Many of the captives were taken to the city of Babylon, some estimate about 600 miles east of Jerusalem in what is now modern-day Iraq.

Imagine their hardship taken from the Land of Promise they knew, to be strangers in an unfamiliar land. Let alone the journey to get there. Can you imagine how they desired to return home?

Maybe this sounds a bit familiar, and maybe you can somewhat relate. Possibly you've been moved to a strange city or to an unfamiliar job. Maybe you know the feeling of captivity, where nothing is familiar. Possibly your life has changed drastically, and you long for what used to be.

Or maybe you haven't moved and things haven't changed at all. And because of this, you feel stuck in your current circumstances. Life feels as if it's passing you by at lightning speed. You question your purpose, the meaning of your life, and you question if you're just here taking up space.

Or you see others succeeding and prospering and achieving. You can't help but wonder, *why not me? When is it my turn, God?*

No matter where we find ourselves today, find encouragement in this.

God has us right where He wants us.

Even if our circumstances aren't perfect. Even if we're facing difficult circumstances. Yes, even when we wish our circumstances were different.

Let's find some hope today.

Did you catch how these people—God's people, none the less—became captives in Babylon?

Verse 4 tells us God sent His own people into exile!

Does this make you a bit uncomfortable, too? God sent his own people in exile?? What??!

Why? The prophet had warned them of their sin against God and their rebellious ways, this exile would likely turn their hearts back to Him. But with all difficult circumstances, God would use theirs, too, for their good. But we can't begin to understand the ways of God, however, we can trust Him in them. And one thing I notice is even though He sent them into exile, He still cared for them while they were there.

Now, please hear me when I say not all difficult circumstances we face are because of God's correction in relation to our sin. Some can be, but they're not always a result of that. Our loving God knows what's best for us, and if our difficult circumstances are because of sin, well, He will show us and love us and teach us through them.

Bottom line: God sent them to Babylon for their good, for His glory, and for the benefit of others.

God does the same for us. The beginning of verse 4 tells us God rules over all, so... Nothing happens that isn't sifted through God's hands first. If He's allowed a certain situation or has us in a certain place, it's

for a reason. We may not like where we are or the situation we're in, but God knows what He's doing. We can trust Him. Even in our difficult circumstances.

Just like these exiles from Jerusalem, we're where we are for our good, for His glory, and for the benefit of others.

But did you catch the instructions God gave His people to thrive in this strange land?

- to build houses and make homes, to plant gardens and eat produce (verse 5)
- to marry, have children, for their children marry and have children, to multiply and prosper (verse 6)
- also to work for success of and pray for city (verse 7)
- and to not listen to false prophets and teachers (verses 8-9)

He didn't tell them to shrink back, to hide or fight. No, He instructed them to thrive in this new strange land. He desired them to prosper and multiply, to be a blessing, and to shine bright in their communities.

These words can be for us today. Even though these instructions were recorded thousands of years ago for these people, we can learn from them today.

They can help us thrive in our difficult circumstances.

1 - Settle in to where God has us.

We can trust God knows what He's doing in our situations, even if we can't see it right now. We can pray and ask Him to encourage our hearts as we accept where we are. Giving ourselves permission to dwell on what's uplifting, encouraging, and hopeful, and to see the blessings God has for us today.

2 - Use what God has given us.

What are we good at? What are our gifts and talents? What's our passion? God has given us gifts to bless others, and not one of us has been blessed with the same exact gifts. The thing is, if we don't use them, the world will never get to experience the benefit or the blessing of our God-given gifts.

3 -Determine to grow (physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally).

Growth is a choice, and just like the Jerusalem exiles, God desires us to grow. To care for ourselves, to stay close to Him. We can choose to learn something new every day and step out of what's comfortable. We can spend time understanding more of God through our Bibles and prayer. You and I can be intentional about staying encouraged and saying only positive words about ourselves, others, our lives. Why not dream that dream that gives you butterflies? And why not encourage someone else to do the same?

4. Help others to thrive.

Let's be about encouraging instead of comparing. Blessing instead of competing. How can we help others thrive in their difficult circumstances? How can you and I make this world a better place? Because when others succeed, we succeed. We're all in this together.

5. Limit our exposure to what/whom keeps us from thriving.

We can choose to hang around people who build us up and desire God's best for our lives. We can remain true to who we are and what we believe no matter what others say/do. Tuning out what's false and setting our minds on what's true keeps us thriving. Also letting go of what robs us of our joy as we cling to what inspires us keeps us pointed in the right direction. We can't control others, but we can control who we hang out with.

God's instructions for His people are timely for us today who find ourselves in difficult circumstances.

But there's one more very important piece: God's hope for our future!

Verses 12-14 remind us of how God is not going to leave us in these circumstances. And one day He will lead us home, and we'll see Him face to face. We'll thrive in ways we can't possibly dream of now. What a day of rejoicing that will be!

We're discussing this over in our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. Come on over there and join in the conversation. The link to this fun group is in the show notes.

I also welcome you to leave a rating and/or review if you were encouraged in this episode.

Congratulations to jalsparkle who won my drawing last week for submitting a review! Your review helps others find this encouragement too.

In closing, God doesn't leave us in our difficult circumstances. He comes alongside us and walks with us through them. No matter what you may be experiencing today, I pray God continues to encourage your heart through this example in His Word. Keep your eyes fixed on Him as you bless the world around you. God bless you!

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