

A New Year . . . A Renewed Hope Lesson One Leaders' Notes

1. Jeremiah prophesied that the exiles would be in Babylon for 70 years. He told them in the verses just before these that they should “make themselves at home” and live a normal life, not to wait to be rescued. A lot of people preferred to believe the false prophets (much like today), some got downright angry with him over his prophecies. Probably none were too excited about the exile lasting 70 years even if they believed him.
2. Jeremiah said that the people of Israel would be returned to their home country just as God had promised. Some may have been encouraged, but like the last question, many may not have been able to look past the 70 years to feel encouraged that it would end someday. Encourage discussion about how the group members would feel to find out they wouldn't get to go home and would be nearly slaves for the next 60 years.
3. Divorce, death of a spouse or other loved one, loss of a job, retirement, moving (especially a forced move), children having problems, finances being cut (or expenses going up with no increase in income), depression, loss of driver's license, having someone mad at you, etc. These are just a few examples. Let the group share their thoughts. Only use these as necessary to spark ideas.
4. No wrong answers. The group might be skeptical about getting to come home especially if they realize that older members of the community would not have lived long enough to return to Israel (we're going to deal with that next week). You might ask if it's difficult to have confidence in this promise from God.
5. No wrong answers—this promise is for “the people of God”
6. This may actually cause some distress for folks that feel like God knows they're having a rough time and seem to be just leaving them there. You might ask why Israel had to go to Babylon (answer: to learn a lesson). Then follow up with encouraging those who are negative to figure out what lesson they can learn in their “exile”
7. If we really believe God has everything under control it can give us great hope
8. For some it didn't change them at all, for the ones who loved God it probably gave them hope. You might break the question up into “How do you think those who were faithful to God felt?” “How did everyone else feel?”
9. When we truly hope, we will have a more positive outlook. People will want to be around us more because of our attitude, so we'll be less likely to be alone, actually bringing us even more hope.

A New Year Lesson 2 ~ Leader's Notes

1. God doesn't ever promise to make us rich. He promises to give us a full and abundant life and wants to have a full relationship with us (see also John 10:10)
2. Older folks may not really see much of a future. The trick is to help them see that God wants to give them a future even at an advanced age. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born, Moses was 80 when he began to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Most theologians believe that the Apostle John was near 90 when he wrote the book of Revelation WHILE IN EXILE. If they can't see any future for themselves, you might ask if they know how old Abraham was when Isaac was born, etc. No wrong answers to the latter questions. Younger folks might use this as a time to realize that it can take years to receive the blessings of God. Sometimes we try to get "abundance" in "things." Many times we have to realize that Jesus Christ is all we need in order to enjoy the abundance that Christ wants to give us.
3. A complete and whole life is a life of contentment. Not perfection, riches or perfect health. It is a life that is OK with where it is while striving to become all Christ calls us to be. It's a life that wants to serve Christ until the very end and doesn't quit just because the body gives out or there's just "no time." It will be a life that adjusts to the fact that age brings failing health, but just changes the mode of service, not the attitude or the fact of service. It's a life of constant prayer (1 Thes 5:17), a life that trusts God completely.
4. Even the 20 year olds would be 80 by the time of the exodus. It is believed that even Daniel was too old to return to Jerusalem at the end of the exile. I suppose they could have given up and just figured that they would never see Jerusalem again, but considering the pride in history that the Jews have even today, I think that those who believed Jeremiah's message taught their children and grandchildren the customs of Jerusalem, they told them the stories of the Old Testament (without written word), they prepared the future generations for the promise that God would deliver them and gave them a future and a hope.
5. No wrong answers, but you might ask how the people of Israel's putting their future hope in their children's hands might inspire them. If they can't teach their own children, there are other children who need someone to give them hope. For younger groups, you might talk about how we can still have hope in the midst of knowing we'll never get to have the kind of life we dreamed.

6. No Wrong Answers

7. Often older folks don't think they have enough time left on earth to do anything worthwhile. (kind of goes back to question 2) There have been a number of authors and artists who have begun their career at an old age. God can use us whenever we submit. We don't have to have 70 yrs to make a difference. On the other hand, younger folks tend to think they have all the time in the world.
8. When we trust in God's promise for a future and a hope we have a more positive attitude. We live healthier because it's a proven fact that a positive outlook makes for a healthier individual.
9. No wrong answers. You might suggest starting a notebook to record the way they see God working every day, or make a list of things they would do before they died if they knew they'd be healthy till they reached 100 (or older). Then suggest they start working on that list immediately.

A Bright Future . . . The Promise of Deliverance ~ Lesson Three Leader's Notes

1. God says He will listen
2. He says that they will find Him
3. Verse 14 talks about the fact that after He is found He will bring them from captivity. This final part of the verse may be more for those of us in the 21st Century than it was for Israel.
4. We can call on God for ANYTHING! Nothing is too small for Him. If it's important to us, than it's important to Him,
5. Those who seek God are in the scripture every day, they are in prayer often and diligently, they participate in studies so they can learn more about who God is, they worship God not just sing songs or listen to the preaching, they think about the words they sing and apply scripture and teaching to their life. They believe God can do everything He says He can do.
6. When we find God, we find a peace that is unexplainable, we become content right where we are even if it's in the midst of exile, we find within us this unexplainable trust that God has everything under control, we begin to "hear" God because we begin to know in our hearts what God wants us to do.
7. When we find God we are prosperous!
8. Often our exile is more a state of mind than a state of being. By "finding God" and focusing on Him we can actually find ourselves no longer living in that state of exile.
9. No wrong answers. Encourage the group to set real goals and report on them when you meet again next week.

