

One BRMC Small Group Study

Seek the Welfare of the City

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the OneBRMC sermon on 9 Aug 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:
Jeremiah 29:4-7

Context:

Today's scripture passage is part of a message that the prophet Jeremiah was relaying to the Israelites who were at that time living in exile in Babylon. In it, God advises them to seek the welfare of Babylon, the city that they are living in.

In the perspective of eternity, this world is not our true home, and one day we will be reunited physically with the Lord. But this world is our *current* home. For as long as we are here on earth, God calls us to seek the welfare of the city, this place we live in, for our benefit, as well as for others' benefit.

Introductory

1. In today's passage (Jeremiah 29:4-7), what was the advice given to the Israelites living in exile in Babylon? Why did Jeremiah say those things?
 - Jeremiah advised them to build houses and settle down, plant gardens and eat what they produce, marry and have sons and daughters, find spouses for their children so that they too will have children, pray for the city in which they are staying, seek after the welfare of the city.
 - Jeremiah was telling the people that they were going to be in Babylon for the long haul; it wasn't something fleeting. He advised them against living a separatist lifestyle apart from the rest of society whilst waiting to go back to their homeland. While they were there, they were to contribute positively to the Babylonian society. It was after some 70 years living in exile, that a large number of Israelites were allowed return to Israel. Those who decided to stay on in Babylonia would become the forebears of Jews in Iraq..

Reflection

2. In his sermon, Rev. Dr. Daniel Koh referenced H. Richard Niebuhr's book, "Christ and Culture", which offers 5 typologies that illustrate how Christians might view engagements with the wider society. Which type do you lean more towards, and why?
 - You might need to explain the 5 types for your group members. The 5 types are:

- Christ against culture
 - Christ against culture occupies one extreme view towards culture. All expressions of culture outside the church are viewed with a high degree of suspicion and as irreparably corrupted by sin. The culture is to be withdrawn from and avoided as much as possible.
- Christ of culture
 - Christ of culture sits at the polar opposite from the previous view. Cultural expressions as a whole are accepted uncritically and celebrated as a good thing. In theory, little or no conflict is seen between culture and Christian truth. In practice, the latter is compromised to accommodate the former.
- Christ above culture
 - Christ above culture, a moderate position between the first two, regards cultural expressions as basically good, as far as they go. However, they need to be augmented and perfected by Christian revelation and the work of the church, with Christ supreme over both.
- Christ and culture in paradox
 - Christ and culture in paradox is another moderate option between the extremes. It sees human culture as a good creation that's been tainted by sin. As a result, there's a tension in the Christian's relationship to culture, simultaneously embracing and rejecting certain aspects of it.
- Christ the transformer of culture
 - Christ the transformer of culture is yet another moderate alternative. It also recognizes human culture as initially good and subsequently corrupted by the fall. But since Christ is redeeming all of creation, the Christian can and should work to transform culture to the glory of God.

(taken from <https://www.focusonthefamily.ca/content/christ-and-culture-five-views>)

3. What are your thoughts and views towards Singapore and the people who live within it? Are you able to pray for and seek the good of Singapore and the people who live within it?
- This is an opportunity for people in the group to share how they perceive Singapore, whether Singapore is their home country, and others who live in Singapore. Do they love or dislike Singapore and its residents? Is it home, truly, or do they prefer to live elsewhere? Whatever their answer is, ask them to elaborate.
 - Do we sincerely and genuinely think about the welfare of those who live with us in Singapore? What does it really mean to think of their welfare and good? Consider these questions:
 - Would you offer your seat on the MRT or bus after a long day at work or school for another person who is both healthy and able, even if it appears that they do not need the seat, just so that you can seek their welfare and good?
 - Would you sacrifice your seat at the food court or hawker centre to others waiting for seats?
 - Would you be like Roger, Rev Jeremy Ong's friend, daily buying overpriced tissue paper to support the seller (from the sermon on 2 August 2020)?
 - Would you sacrificially give up the last hand sanitiser at the shop, which is in your hand to the person beside you?

Application

4. What are ways in which Christians can contribute positively to the well-being of the wider society? Share examples that you know of.

- "As Christians we can contribute to fostering societal well-being and the common good. We can do so at different levels. We can reach out to the poor and powerless; the voiceless and the vulnerable.

...For those who are endowed with a good mind and clear thinking, the country needs you to help shape the political and moral vision of our city, and to craft policies which will generate goodwill and enhance the overall quality of life for all people. Be the thought-leaders in the political realm, in the business world, in civil service and the universities.

At a more practical level, all of us can give our time and offer our service by working with agencies like Epworth Community Services, the MWS and those run by the local churches and Christian organisations to help alleviate the struggles and sufferings of people who are otherwise easily ignored and forgotten by others.

At a simpler level, we can give generously and regularly in support of worthwhile causes and social outreach ministries that care for the poor, the underprivileged, youth-at-risks, the elderly, the sick and the lonely. The opportunities for helping to attend to the welfare of our community are there for our active participation.

We can make a positive difference to the welfare of our city when more Christians avail themselves to working, at different levels, for the common good in the various spheres of life." (Rev. Dr. Daniel Koh, sermon on 9 August 2020)

5. How can you start finding ways to look out for the well-being of people in our city?

- One suggested way is to start small – look around at the people you come across daily – around your home, workplaces, places you frequent regularly. Get to know them on a personal level. Show care and kindness to them. Listen to their life stories.
- Another suggestion is to be in active prayer for others. When we are on the bus or MRT we can pray for fellow commuters. When we are at the food court or restaurant, we can pray for fellow patrons and we can pray for those who wait on tables, prepare and cook the food, as well.
- We can commit to pray for our co-workers, class or school mates, our teachers; all teachers even.
- As a small group, we can remind each other to pray for the welfare and good of others, we can develop a regular theme of focused prayer for particular groups, we can spend time together praying for these groups of people or for individuals outside our usual communities.
- With our prayers, we can ask God to open our eyes to show us whom we can serve and how we can serve them.
- For those in your group who are working, you can encourage them to think about how their work contributes/can contribute positively to the well-being of others in society, as a reminder and a reinstatement of their purpose in being placed there.

- Perhaps take some time now to write out a plan of action for prayer and then expressions of love towards those in our nation who are outside our usual communities.

Prayer

6. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you need God's help to find ways to contribute to your society

"Almighty Father, teach me what I can do to help others in this country. Give me the heart to love those around me, that I may be able to be a blessing to them. Help me to be a channel of Your love, peace and joy to those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen."

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you feel led to pray for this country:

Suggested prayer pointers:

- o Pray for its leaders
 - o Pray for its peace and safety
 - o Pray for its prosperity
 - o Pray for the church within, that it will be the salt and light to the nation
- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.