



Summer Family reunion (Part 7)

Making Your Community a great place to live

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today the Summer Family Reunion comes to an end. At some point, all family needs to go home. It's kind of sad. We do it for a month and a half. I love this time of year and today I'm closing it out in Jeremiah 29. If you have your bibles, turn there. I'm actually going to encourage you to grab your device and look up Jeremiah 29 on the Bible App or online as we talk about making your community a great place to live.

Yesterday, we had a great time with family. If you are new to Branson, you picked the perfect weekend to visit our town. I saw a friend of mine walking out of the Fireworks tent this week and he was loaded down. I was like "Bro, do you do this every year? He goes, never done it before, felt a lot of pressure with this 250 thing."

I get it. I stayed up last night. I thought I was going to be in bed by 10, all the festivities would be good, and I stayed up to watch the president's speech and then to watch the fireworks. Did anybody watch the fireworks out of Washington D.C.? it didn't end. Finally, after 20 minutes, I decided to tape the rest of it, or record it... for you younger people. Was there a finale to that fireworks show? The whole thing was a finale. I can't even imagine... So, I'm going to watch that this after afternoon,

but you've heard that women live longer than men and this weekend is really a good reminder of why that's true. Alright, listen, nowhere in the United States of America was there a group of women sitting around yesterday going, you know

what we should do...? You will never get me to blur the lines between the differences, the created differences between men and women. Now, I don't know if you know this.... You can look it up on your ChatGPT, but married men live longer than single men. That's true. One of the big reasons is you have a wife that tells you, "Don't do that." That's the primary reason.

I have that wife. My wife cares for me, she deeply cares for me. She's the one that schedules all my doctor's appointments and colonoscopies against my will. She sneaks good food into the foods I love. I was once eating a brownie and I'm like something's not right and she goes, "It's Sukini"

I drink a shake every morning and I'm like; *something is off with the shake. She goes, "It's fish Oil."* So, she's always sneaking stuff in. *I like the new thing of protein. Obviously, I have not had enough protein in my first 50 years of living. I get handed candy bar every day around 2:00. But she walks me and the dogs every night before sunset. She is passionate about my health. Why? Because she loves me. And I want to share this.*

I've been talking to my children about this all week. Why I want my children to love their country. Why I want them to love the United States of America. I am not a perfect husband, but Amy cares for me because she loves me. My family is not perfect, but I love my family. This church is not perfect by no stretch of imagination, but I love Woodland Hills Family Church, And guess what? Our

nation is not perfect, but I love the United States of America, and I'm grateful to live here. And I want my kids to love it. Here's why I want my kids to love their country: because there are a lot of problems they are going to inherit. a lot of things they need to fix, and guess what. They are not going to fix something in a country they don't love. I hate this.... You know the builders, the boomers, and the Xers, I wish we would solve more of these problems rather than just handing them to our kids, but to my millennial and Gen Z friends, you are going to receive some problems that are going to be handed to you and you are going to be the leaders in your community and in this nation and you won't take care of it if you don't love it. I think about the builder generation.

I talked to Bob Starns during our first gathering. These are those who are born before 1945. They came through the great depression of World War Two. I call them the builder generation because they literally built this nation for us.

Words I use to describe the Builder Generation are Duty, Loyalty, sacrifice, honor and commitment.

They gave birth to the Baby boomers. There are a lot of those in our church and community. They were born 1946 – 1964. They came through the invention of the television; they got to enjoy that. civil rights, Vietnam, Elvis, the Beatles, and they are very loyal to brands.

If your parents RCA television broke and the RCA television repair man couldn't fix it, they bought another RCA Television. And they bought it from Sears. They drive Chiveys and Fords. And your Boomer parents aren't trading them in. Most of them aren't trading them in for a Tesla. They are keeping their Chevy; they are keeping their Ford. They are very loyal.

The Boomers heard from their builder parents, "We didn't have it", Do you know why? The builders grew up in a very difficult time. And not only do I use the term builder, but I also use the term survival. They survived so much and they heard, growing up, we don't have it, so you're not getting it.

But then they accumulated some things in the Boomer generation and they looked to their kids, me, Gen X and said, "We didn't have it, you don't need it, is what they told the Boomers and the Xers.

But now what do we tell our kids? "We got it and we are going to make sure you have all of it." So, they raised the Xers and the boomers passed it onto us.

1965 to 1980. You have the cold war, MTV. We rolled up our pant legs and said, words like Rad, and Karley. We came through a lot, but we are less trusting of brands. Can I just say this to the Builders and to the Boomers and to the Gen Xers, I want to encourage you in this season of life. Don't just make it about you and getting to the end, but continue to plant trees that will one day provide shade that you won't be here to enjoy. But the future generations will be here. And that's the millennials. That's Gen Z, the Millennial born between 1981 and 1996. They are tech the savvy generation. They teach you how to work the new technology and how to get into your Netflix accounts. They have a sense of community and collaboration.

Behind them is Gen Z 1997 –. Think about it. They've never known a world without the internet or social media. These younger generations value authenticity, transparency collaboration, being real.

So there are three things the builders, the Boomers, and the Xer's can give them

1. Be honest with them. Don't fake it. They have great radar for that.
2. They want to be told they are doing a good job, so tell them. Don't blow smoke, but when they do a good job, tell them Great Job!
- 3.
4. Start to hand them the keys. Encourage them to start leading and as we look at the generations today and then Jeremiah 29, we are going to talk about the people of Judah. The people of Judah were God's children. Some generations saw great spiritual revival through Kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, but others rebelled against God. They were a wicked, stubborn generations who turned to Idols. Jeremiah 29 is dated 597 BC, written to the people of Judah. Jeremiah receives the word from the Lord; he writes his sins and then this letter in Babylon because they have been taken captive from Jerusalem and he is going to declare for them... We read in Jeremiah 29:10... and you are going to see this quite a bit in Jeremiah. This is what the Lord says... He's a prophet, he's declaring the word of the Lord to them. When 70 years are completed for Babylon... So there is a set time that God gives for this exile from Jerusalem. He says I will come to you and fulfill my good promise. And God is a promise keeping God. And I will bring you back to this place, Jerusalem. The Temple will be rebuilt; worship will be restored. And he tells them, This is what I have said. He tells his people he will bring them back, but there is a gap, there's a waiting period. It will be fulfilled on God's timeline, not theirs. They will return to Jerusalem, but what about the time? What should the exiles, God's people, taken from Jerusalem to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. What should they do in the meantime. You would think, in a place they don't want to live and a place they don't want to be, under a ruthless superpower leader, that they had great disdain for, that God might tell them, "Hey listen, just do your time.

Just endure this. Just get by and then, if the Babylonians come against you just resist them at all costs.” You would think that might be some of what they heard, but it’s not what they heard at all. What they are going to hear is “Make Babylon a great place to live” Don’t shrink, don’t back down, I want you to flourish in this time. And Jeremiah: 29 is going to teach us three ways to make the most of your community. The message is going to go a lot to young people today because, again, in our community, and seniors, hang on and ask the Lord to Call you by name today in areas you need to grow in your conversations with your children and your grandchildren, but we have young people in our church and in our community who can’t wait to get out of here. They don’t feel they have as many opportunities here. They are looking at other places in the country.

So, there are those who are like, I can’t wait to get out of here, and there are those who are saying, this is home, this is where I’m staying and I’m going to make my life here. I’m going to speak to both today. the word of the Lord is going to speak to both of us today because we know this; we are right where God wants you to be, right now, in this very moment, and this is what God says, first and foremost to the people of Judah.

Verse 4 of Jeremiah 29 – we are going to learn to trust God with where you live. Believe that he is sovereign over where you are right now. And for many, it may be a place you don’t want to be.

Verse 4 says, this is what the Lord, Almighty, the God of Israel says to all those, and this is key, I carried into Exile... The strong point is made to the children. *You may be against Nebuchadnezzar, but make no mistake, it wasn’t nebuchadnezzar ultimately that brought you here, I brought you here.*

You have some lessons to learn. You need to grow, you need to return to me. He says, “I carried you into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

The people of Judah had great disdain for Nebuchadnezzar. He was a ruthless superpower, pure evil in their eyes, yet God called Nebuchadnezzar his servant.

We read a couple of chapters earlier in Jeremiah 27: 6
My servant, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Can you imagine them reading this letter. The exiles in Babylon not wanting to be there. First of all, they realize it's going to be 70 years. You understand some people who are reading that letter would never return to Jerusalem. As they read it, they realized , *I'm going to die* here. So, what do I do. My children and grandchildren will make the return, but I am going to be here. The lesson for us that we start with today in Jeremiah is simple. God, not Nebuchadnezzar, brought the people into captivity. God, not Nebuchadnezzar determined the length of captivity. And this is so important for us to understand in the world and the country we live in right now. Man is not ultimately in charge of final outcomes, God is sovereign.

We read in Proverbs 21: 1 – the Kings heart is in the hand of the Lord. like the river of waters, he turns it wherever he wishes.

I'm going to ask this question; are going to record it so I can bring it up again in four or eight years. How many of you would say amen to the kings heart is in the hand of the Lord? Amen? Amen. That's what the Bible teaches. The kings heart is in the hand of the Lord and there are going to be some leaders you like and some leaders you don't. Like going to be some you voted for and some you didn't vote for. Evil world leaders... think about this... Evil World Leaders, the ones we think hold all the power and make all the decisions for all of us, are not in charge of final outcomes. God is ultimately in charge. And this is why, young people, it makes makes no sense for you to hate your nation. It makes no sense for you to hate your community or the leaders that might be in it.

It's makes no sense to me when I hear people say, I'm leaving the United States. I "don't want to be ruled by a king. I'm moving to England." There are some people not laughing right now and they need to be reminded England has a King.

Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord, our God. And he is ultimately in charge. This is why the church today needs to hear this because we put way too much power in the hands of men, when ultimately it is the Lord Almighty. God was sovereign over the exiles and he is

sovereign and control over where you are this very moment. He sees you. You trust him with your future, you can trust him with your current position in life.

Whenever I'm in a waiting season that I might be frustrated with, I just feel like there is something better, something more that's maybe difficult, I want it to end so I can move to the next thing. I know God has a plan even in the waiting.

And even in the waiting, even in a place I might not want to be, he's working on me.

And this is how much he loves his children. He's working on them, he's teaching them, he's growing them, even in these moments and in these places that are uncomfortable.

So, for the one in the room, and they are here and there are senior adults right now that are just like, "I can't believe somebody would want to leave this wonderful town, there is a 16-year-old or 20-year-old in the row in front of you who might be thinking I can't wait to get out of here. To that young person, this is what I want to say: If your thinking *I can't wait to get out of here*, I want you to ask the question, "God, what do you have for me while I'm here? What are you teaching me right now?" Because it goes into the second thing we learned from Jeremiah.

Make the most of where you live. Make the most of where he has you right now. God could have told his children, mind your own business, stick to yourselves, just get through the 70 years. He could have told them, Work against the Babylonians. But what's not what we read in Jeremiah 29: 5 and 6 – build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughter in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters and the generations are going to increase In crease in number. not decrease.

God is telling his children to flourish. Don't just endure. There is no benefit to hating your place in life right now. Make the most of where I have you right now. He didn't want them to endure. This is the idea of bloom where you are planted. Make the most of where you are right now.

Some of you are visiting here from other states and I always love meeting guests who have a great family vacation in Branson and they are like we are moving here. So many of us moved here after a vacation. But sometimes you might think its going to be great and all we do all week long is ride roller coasters and drive go-carts and eat funnel cakes. Let me tell you... no. there is a community here and we live life, we are serving a lot of tourists, but I want you to know wherever you are going back to, I hear this all the time... I hear from people, many I wish I heard messages like this at my church in my blue state. Wherever God has you right now, praise your father in heaven and ask, what are you teaching me where I am right now. How are you growing me. God's children are told it will be a while before you return to Jerusalem, so create new lives in Babylon. Make the most of where you are. Don't delay, don't hold off on life if you are not living in a place you want to be.

Robert Holden... He's from the UK., I thought I would through as many Brits in as I could on this week of Independence. That's what I told the guy with all those fireworks. I'm like, that's what I love about America. We shook off the chains now let's blow some stuff up.

But Robert Holden is a professor in the UK. He coined the term Destination Addiction. And his articles read something like how to stop thinking about what comes next.

In America, we are guilty of this. We have a very difficult time making the most of the season or the place we are in because we think that joy and life are out there. it's in the next place.

Here is how he describes destination addiction – it's the preoccupation with the idea that happiness is somewhere else. It leaves us permanently dissatisfied. Our current work is just a stepping stone or a parking lot and where we just need to hang out while waiting for the next good opportunity. The workday is just another day to endure until we get to Friday. And then we are going to use the weekend to recover.

Destination addiction is an attempt to get on with life faster in the hope that we will enjoy our lives better later.

If you are wondering if you suffer from destination addiction, here's a few more symptoms for you.

whatever you are doing, you're always thinking about what comes next. You can't be present in your work or in your home or in your community.

2 – your dream home is always the next home you plan to buy, not the one you are in right now. You never commit fully to anything in case something better comes along. I think this is one of the things I enjoy most about getting older. I'm at that age where I'm like I'm not going. You call me and want me to go do something. I'm like why did you even call me? How many of you watching the fireworks on TV last night thought it was the best?

But you never commit fully to your work or your community because what if somebody asks me to do something else. you always think you should be further ahead of where you are right now.

So, young people... I was in a meeting this week and this brilliant guy was leading the meeting and he asked, "Does Branson have a brain drain. Everybody in the room starting answering it and I'm like Brain Drain? I had to look it up. Here's what Chat GPT said. It's the loss of educated skill and talented people from a community as they move elsewhere for better opportunities.

This migration often occurs because of higher salaries, better working conditions and economic stability. When I talk to young people, that's one of the reasons I hear of, "I gotta get out of here. There's something better for me out there."

Let me just do this, let me just paint a picture for the young people that think Branson is not a place to call home, not a place to raise a family. And the disclaimer is if God's calling you somewhere else, I'm not here today to stand in the way of that. Go where God calls you, 100 percent, but for those of you who are wondering what does Branson look like 10 years from now. I want to share with you all of the positions, all of the leadership positions in our town that are going to soon become available. Sooner than you think Let me tell you what's going to become available. Realtor, Hotel owner, Landscaper, Parks director. We are going to need new mayors. Guess what? We don't live forever. So, you're

town is going to need a mayor and, people it's you, we are going to need aldermen, county commissioners, nightly rental managers. We are going to need sheriffs and deputies. We are going to need new senior pastors, sooner than you think.

And it's time for you to start looking at what does this look like for me. we need contractors, subcontractors. We need HVAC, we need plumbers, electricians, roofers. They are making a killing right now. Roofers are making a ton of money. Masons, house flippers. Some of you drive through neighbor hoods and your life man this neighborhood is really run down. Young people, buy a house, fix it up and sell it. start making this place a beautiful place to live. Some of you are going to be handed keys to a company you didn't start, but they are going to say, "Hey, it's time for you to run this."

general managers, golf course managers, golf coarse pros, Doctors, nurses, dentist, teachers, principals, the superintendent, they will be dead soon like we all.... Because death is the destiny of every man and these position need to be filled and you are in your 20's thinking there is nothing here for you. There is so much here for you. City Administrators, Ranchers, farmers, photographers, graphic designers, truckers. There's so much opportunity. I just want to encourage you where we are going with this...

It's not just make the most of where you live, but seek the best for your city, seek the best for your community. Seek the best for your boss, your coworkers, you community, city, and country. Seek peace and prosperity in places that feel less than ideal for you. what's Jeremiah 29:7 Also... so he's told them flourish, don't shrink back, increase in number, plant gardens, build homes, get married, have families, flourish, don't just endure. But then go beyond just you and your family. Seek the peace and prosperity of the place you live. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city if have carried you. this is my work I have done, The Lord says. into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

That's why it makes no sense to hate your nation. It makes no sense to hate the place you live. Because if the place you live deteriorates, falls apart, has no growth, that affects you and your family. He's saying flourish God is telling people and we could probably put this on a hat... Make Babylon a great place to live. Because you are living there and you're going to be there a few generations.

You've got some time left. And for some of you, you're going to die in this place, so make it a great place to live, seek peace and prosperity, and for us here in the Ozarks, make Reeds Spring a great place to live. Make Branson West and great place to live. Make Kimberling city a great place to live. Make Lampe a great place to live.

Omaha, Harrison, Forsyth, Hollister, Ozark, Walnut Shade, Galina is a great place to live. Make Branson a great place to live

You should do a drive this week and just drive through these communities and pray, Lord, Bless this community. Pray for the leaders of that community.

I was talking to a friend the other day. He was running for an office in a small town and it was like 70 people showed up to vote. I'm like those are towns in our area that need us. Seeking peace and prosperity and praying for them to grow.

So, pray for your boss and company. Pray for the businesses, schools, churches and leaders in your city. Pray for the peace and prosperity of our state and country. I want you to pray for leaders you voted for and pray for leaders you didn't vote for. because the heart of a king is in the hand of God.

As we close, I love this... it brings it into context. So, everything we just studied is bringing us to one of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses in the entire Bible.

Jermiah 29:11 I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. It's on coffee mugs, it's on plaques and we get it so confused, but now we know it in context. And by the way, you can't read Verse 11 alone. It is a thought of Verse 10 and 11 together. This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise and I'm bringing you back to Jerusalem. I'm bringing you back to this place. Worship will be restored. You are my people.

This isn't a break in thought, new quotation marks. It is the same word from the Lord. For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. where you are at right now feels like prison and like torture, but I know ultimately what I'm doing. Do you trust me with where you are and

what is happening? It's not to harm you, they are plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11 is not about God showing favor on my personal plans for the future. Jeremiah

Jeremiah 29: 11 is not about God showing favor on my personal plans for the future. Jeremiah 29:11 is not about asking God to bless my personal pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It's God keeping his promise to his covenant people. and today, we need to be reminded our hope, church, is in Jesus, not where we live. Our hope today is in Jesus... I love the singing the old hymn my - hope is built on nothing less than Jesus's name and righteousness My hope is built on Jesus, and on his promises. I built my life on that rock, not on the sinking sand, not my plans for the future.

My hope is built on Jesus and his promises, not my pursuit in life.

/and because my hope is in Christ, hope and because Christ is your hope. Our sins are forgiven because he is our hope, our life has purpose. because Christ is our hope The grave is not the end

Because Christ is my hope, my future is in heaven. Bottom line is Jesus is King. He's our king. We trust him. We are grateful for where we live. We need to be praying harder instead of fighting so much against the leaders in our community and in our country. Christian, be reminded today you have a dual citizenship – the Kingdom of heaven and a citizen of the United States of America. And Citizen of Heaven trumps it all. You are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven first and foremost and Jesus is King. And he is the one we put our hope in and trust with our future.

And in Jeremiah 29: 12-13 the Lord says, *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.*

This captivity had a purpose. It builds something in you. it changed something in you and it drew you back to me.

Verse 13 – *you will seek me and find me and when you seek me with all of your heart.*

Father, I pray today for the United States of America on this 250th birthday of our nation. I pray for our president, our vice president, the cabinet, our entire congress, and senate, I pray for our lieutenant Nant governor
For the leaders of our state. I pray for mayors all throughout the Ozarks, aldermen, commissioners, not to lead toward religious freedom, but to lead according to the truth of God's work. That they would understand the truth and that we would be people that embrace that. Father, I pray for the one that their hope has been in this nations, their hope has been in what happens or doesn't happen on their timeline. I just pray that today, if they've never placed faith Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation, that they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he's been raised from the dead and that Jesus would be king in their life today. we pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen