

WEEK ONE

Strangers in a Strange Time



Ask a member of the family to read Genesis 12:1-5 aloud.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (NIV)

Exile—being sent to a foreign land—is a reoccurring theme throughout Scripture.

Reflecting on the passage, answer the following questions:

- List some things you like about being home, surrounded by your family?
- When you think of your home—your room, your toys, your bed—what kind of feelings come to mind?
- Have you ever had to leave home for several days, whether it was for a trip or to stay with relatives? What did that feel like? Did you miss home or enjoy being on an adventure in a new place?
- Think about some of the people in the Bible who had to leave their homes and live in a foreign land for a long time. What do you think they were feeling?
- Think of people in your life who might be going through a change. Perhaps they just moved to a new house or joined a new classroom or are looking for new friends. How can you be comforting to them?

- God says that he is with us wherever we are and that he makes his home inside of our hearts. What do you think this means?

Group activity

Christians aren't the only ones who feel a sense of displacement or hardship in the world. With your family, think of some other people groups who might have physical or spiritual needs and struggles. Together, pray for them.

Children's prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for making your home in my heart, so that no matter where I go, I know you are always with me. Show me how to help people around me who may feel scared or shy or that they don't belong. Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

- In *Embracing Exile*, Dr. Daniels describes how the church is going through cultural exile today. Christians, he says, are “living in a world that we struggle to understand, that no longer seems to speak the language of historic Christian faith, and over which we feel very little control” (p. 18). Do you feel that Christianity is strange in today's culture? In what ways?
- What are Christians known for in the world? What do you wish we were known for?
- If we were to take serious Jesus's commandment to love, how would that make us different in the world?
- In the book, on page 7, Dr. Daniels references this Walter Brueggemann quote: “Exile is the way to new life in new land. One can scarcely imagine a more radical, less likely understanding of history. In covenantal categories, embrace of curse is the root to blessing. In New Testament categories, embrace of death is the way to life.” What does Brueggemann mean by this? How is embracing exile “radical” in the eyes of the world?
- What would it look like for the church to embrace exile today?
- What would it look like for you to embrace exile in your own life?
- When is a time God took something challenging in your life and used it to bring about good?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

WEEK TWO

Now You Are God's People



Ask a member of the family to read 1 Peter 2:9-10 aloud.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (NIV)

In this scripture, Peter declares that we are God's people. In other words, we are God's family.

Reflecting on the passage, answer the following questions:

- Who would you consider a part of your family? What makes them your family?
- Your family is also a part of a bigger family—the family of God. Who are some people you know in God's family?
- How have members of God's family helped you or been there for you in the past?
- What are the characteristics of someone in the family of God?

Group activity

Find a container and label it "Family of God."

Ask family members to write on small strips of paper the characteristics of a person who is in the family of God. After everyone has finished, share what you wrote and place the strips of paper in the container. Encourage your family to add ideas to the container throughout the week.

Children's prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for my family, and thank you for the people of God you have put in my life. Help me to remember I am not alone, and help me to show others with my words and actions that I am in the family of God.

Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

- In the introduction to *Embracing Exile*, Dr. Daniels writes, “The goal of the church in exile is not simply to survive in order to get to the other side someday but to live within exile as a countermissional people, extending salt and light to a broken world” (p. 13). What does it mean to you to live as “salt and light”?
- What does it mean on a daily basis for you to begin living your life with joy, instead of simply surviving?
- What are ways your family can be more intentional about supporting each other as you seek to live in such a way that together you bless the world around you?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

WEEK THREE

This Is My Story



Ask a member of the family to read Hebrews 11:1, 7-12 aloud.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. . . .

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. (NIV)

This scripture tells the stories of three people in the bible: Noah, Abraham, and Sarah.

Reflecting on the passage, answer the following questions:

- What does this scripture tell you about Noah?
- What does this scripture tell you about Abraham?
- What does this scripture tell you about Sarah?
- In this scripture, the phrase “by faith” is repeated again and again. What do these words mean to you?
- What does it look like to live by faith in your own life?

Group activity

Our lives are like stories, and no two stories are the same. Have your family members name a few important memories or moments in their own life stories (for example, a family vacation, meeting a relative for the first time, helping a friend, or a special event). Discuss how the memories of each person reflect who he or she is and what he or she considers important.

Children's prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for the special moments in my life that make up my story. Help me to live by faith in everything I do—how I act, what I say, and the way I think.

Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

- In chapter 3 of *Embracing Exile*, Dr. Daniels discusses how the Christian story has declined in influence and competing cultural stories have risen in popularity. In particular, he mentions three examples: the success story, the nation story, and the humanist story.
 - *Success story*: Life is about accumulating wealth, power, and pleasurable experiences.
 - *Nation story*: People find their primary identity within a certain culture, race, or language.
 - *Humanist story*: The point of life is to keep helping humanity become better.

Why do you think these competing stories are so appealing to us as people?

- Can you think of any other stories that vie for our attention?
- Dr. Daniels also talks about people's tendency to live out multiple stories at once—piecing together fragments from a number of different narratives. What are ways we have joined God's story with the competing stories of wealth and power?
- What influences—people or experiences—have shaped your story?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

WEEK FOUR

Holiness Takes Practice(s)



What is something you have learned to do that required practice? How often—and for how long—did you have to practice? Did you get better the more you practiced?

Ask a member of the family to read Romans 12:2 aloud.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

Reflecting on the passage, answer the following questions:

- *To renew* means “to make new again” or “to begin again.” What do you think it means to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”?
- The Bible talks a lot about holiness. What do you think holiness means?
- Why do you think it takes practice to keep your mind focused on God and to live a holy life?
- What are some activities you can do to help keep your focus on God?
- We aren’t holy because we are good. We are holy because Jesus lives in us! What is a time you felt Jesus help you do the right thing?

Group activity

The fruit of the Spirit describes different qualities of holiness. Read aloud the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23, and have members of the family talk about what each word means in his or her own words. You could also give an example for each word.

Next, ask the family to pick one of the words to concentrate on for the remainder of the week.

Children’s prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for showing us what it means to be holy. Help us to practice how to live a holy life and to follow you.

Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

- Reread the parable of the ducks in chapter 4 of *Embracing Exile* found on page 64. How does this parable relate to the topic of holiness?
- As Christians, why is it so difficult to carry out Monday through Saturday what we hear preached on Sunday?
- Where in your own spiritual life do you want to practice “flying” instead of waddling? What will your practice look like?
- In chapter 4 of *Embracing Exile*, Dr. Daniels writes, “What the church also needs are practices of reconciliation and forgiveness that rehabilitate the lives of the faithful into people who might actually go into the world and turn the other cheek or go the second mile” (p. 65). What does turning the other cheek or going the second mile mean for the church in this day and age? What does it mean in your own life?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

WEEK FIVE

Blessing Babylon



Ask a member of the family to read Jeremiah 29:4-7 aloud.

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “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 daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (NIV)

Reflecting on the passage, answer the following questions:

- What chores or jobs are you responsible for in your household?
- What are some of the responsibilities of other members of your family?
- How do you work together to get everything done?
- When God’s people were living in Babylon—far away from their homes—they weren’t planning their escape or sitting around until God brought them out of Babylon. Their goal was to go to work, bless their new neighbors in Babylon, and reflect the love, goodness, and hospitality of God. How can we show love, goodness, and hospitality when we help with chores around the house?
- How can we show love, goodness, and hospitality to our neighbors?

Group activity

Take time as a family to choose one way you can begin to help each other with “work” both in your home and outside your home.

Children’s prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for my family and the work we do together. Help me to show love, goodness, and hospitality to my family, my friends, and my neighbors.

Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

In *Embracing Exile*, Dr. Daniels writes, “The shocking thing about the word of the prophets to those in exile is that they don’t really encourage the people to look for, pray for, or try to discover a way out. Rather, the people are invited to settle down and work” (p. 80).

- Is there an area in your life that you feel you are just trying to get through as quickly as possible in order to reach the next season?
- How can you begin to “settle down and work” in this area of your life?
- What might God be doing in your heart during more challenging situations or seasons of life?
- Dr. Daniels talks about the ways we are all “ministers” in our various fields of work. Cabdrivers are ministers of transportation. Doctors are ministers of medicine. Your algebra teacher is a minister of math. What does it look like to be a minister where you are today?
- Reflect on people whom God has brought into your life and has asked you to bless. Who comes to mind? And what ways can you show them God’s love, goodness, and hospitality?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

WEEK SIX

Raising Resident Aliens



Ask a member of the family to read Joshua 4:1-7 aloud.

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” (NIV)

Reflecting on the passage, answer the following questions:

- (For adults) Talk about the history behind one of your current family traditions. Where and when did this tradition begin? Share with your kids.
- What are other important values, stories, or traditions you have as a family?
- How do traditions and values shape us as people?
- Is there a tradition or set of values that you hope to pass down to your children when you are grown?

Group activity

Now that you’ve discussed existing family traditions, come up with a new family tradition based on your values and convictions (for example, giving to a family in need each Christmas, serving at a soup kitchen each month, or having a family devotional time each day before school). Commit to beginning this tradition as a family so that it becomes a part of your family’s identity.

Children's prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for my parents and the traditions and stories they have passed on to me. Help me remember these traditions and apply them to my life and my actions.

Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

In chapter 6 of *Embracing Exile*, Dr. Daniels writes, "Our actions as human beings flow from three core areas: our values, our identity, and our convictions" (p. 96).

- What do the words *values*, *identity*, and *convictions* mean to you? (If you desire, use a dictionary to help you understand the differences in these words.)
- How are your actions shaped by these three areas?
- Dr. Daniels also writes, "Our loves or our desires are not totally innate. Desires and values are nurtured and trained. Our hearts *learn* to want the right or the wrong things" (p. 97, emphasis added). Do you agree with this last statement? How do you think our hearts learn to want the right or wrong things? How can we learn better to want the right things?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

WEEK SEVEN

More Than Survivors



Ask a member of the family to read Isaiah 49:6 aloud.

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. (NIV)

This week's group activity falls before the questions.

Group activity

Turn off all the lights in a room so it is completely dark. Have a member of the family turn on one lamp, or light a single candle.

Answer the following questions:

- What effect did one light have in a room of darkness?
- Why do you think we are more afraid in the dark than in the light?
- Why does Jesus call himself the Light of the World?
- How can we shine our light for the world to see?

As a light to the world, often we look different or unique. Read the following quote from page 116 of *Embracing Exile* as a closing prayer.

Family prayer

Dear God,

Help “our uniqueness . . . look like unconditional love, a commitment to peacemaking, a bent toward forgiveness and reconciliation, a concern for justice and mercy, a hunger after the things of God, and lives that seek first the kingdom.”

Amen.

Optional questions for older children and adults

In chapter 7 of *Embracing Exile*, Scott Daniels writes, “The mission of the church in exile is not just to have a message but also to become the message” (p. 113).

- What is the difference between God’s people having a message and becoming the message?
- What is God’s message for the world? Why does he partner with us to get his message out into the world?
- What are the challenges of sharing our message with the world today?
- As we finish this seven-week study, discuss what you’ve learned about exile. How is God calling you to embrace exile?

Copyright © 2017 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

Scriptures marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*® (NIV®).

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.