

Eudaimonia: Environment

**Jeremiah 29:5-6, 10; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21; Exodus 23:10-13; Genesis 1:27-28;
1 Corinthians 15:58**

Eudaimonia is a Greek word that is best translated to ‘flourishing’ or ‘thriving’, but it goes much deeper than that. The way that we relate to the world around us has a lot to do with whether or not we thrive or flourish in life as well as how we allow for everything and everyone around us to also flourish.

Settle in Exile: We know that we should steward the earth and all its resources well (Conservationism, don’t litter, etc.), but do we know why? Of course it’s logical that if you want something to last, you should probably take care of it. But do we understand that it is part of our mission and purpose given to us by God? We already know what we should do and how to take care of the earth, but until we understand the ‘why’ behind the ‘what’, our motivation may not be in line with our actions.

Read Jeremiah 29:5. It seems like pretty logical advice for anyone who is wanting to do well in life, but when we understand the context that this was written in, it changes things.

Jeremiah was a prophet that God used to share messages with the Israelites while they were in exile in Babylon. This was not their home or their nation. This was not the Promised Land that Moses had led them to from Egypt. It was not where they wanted to be.

Then God told Jeremiah to tell them to settle in for a bit. This couldn’t have been welcome news to them. Surely they would have much preferred it if Jeremiah had said that God was going to deliver them that week or if he had instructed them to take up arms in revolt against Babylon. But if you read on in verse 10, Jeremiah told them, *“This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.’”*. Seventy years is a long time and seems very specific. Why 70?

History lesson: Israel entered the Promised Land around 1407 BC. God gave them specific Laws and instructions (covenant agreement) on how to live in the Promised Land. Read Exodus 23:10-13. Notice where it says, *“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused.”*

This is good stewardship. It follows God’s example in chapter 1 of Genesis and respects the needs of others, animals, and resources. Sabbath is not just for us. Our rest allows for the rest of others. Everything and everyone needs a time to be refreshed. When rest/sabbath is not observed, resources and energy become depleted.

Israel didn’t do a stellar job of keeping their part of their covenant agreement with God. Then Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC. 2 Chronicles 36 tells the story of how God allowed Babylon to overtake Jerusalem because of the Israelites’ unfaithfulness to their side of the covenant agreement made when they entered the Promised Land.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:20-21. Exile in Babylon was a physical representation of their spiritual separation from God. It was a punishment.

There was about 500 years between the two events. Keep in mind in that last scripture where it said *“the land enjoyed its sabbath rest...”* as we look at this next scripture.

Math Time: There was about 500 years between the entering of the Promised Land and the fall of Jerusalem. If we divide **500** (Remember - this is an estimate - don’t know the exact year that

they entered the Promised Land) by 7 (every 7 years is a year of sabbath rest for the land) you get about 71! That's 71 sabbath years. So while Israel was exiled in Babylon, the land rested during those 70 years. (Refer back to 2 Chronicles 36:21) *If the 1 bothers you - remember the 500 is an estimate.*

This sure seems like an intentional act of God showing his people how to be good stewards of the land, animals, and community he entrusted to them. Israel's punishment of exile in Jerusalem was God's gift of restoration to the land He had given to Israel that they had misused. So the land rested for 70 years to make up for the 70 years that Israel failed to allow the land to rest.

Managing God's Creation: Land, like people, requires rest to have nutrients restored and as a prevention to pests. God began the work of creation then made humans in his image to continue his creative work through responsible stewardship. God intimately cares about ALL of his creation and He has entrusted it to us to steward and cultivate in partnership with Him.

James Fowler says, *"Humankind is that part of nature in which its awareness of relatedness and kinship with God has formed. Humankind is called to increasing degrees of conscious partnership with God in the ongoing elaboration and perfection of creation toward God's ends. This does not separate us from nature, however. Rather, it gives us a growing awareness of our kinship with, membership in, and custodial responsibility for brother earth and sister nature. And more, it means that the creativity of nature - which is part of its mirroring of the image of God - is peculiarly and precariously concentrated in the human sphere of nature. God seems willing to take the risk of a special kind of growing partnership with our kind. In a way that seems to put earth and nature at risk, God welcomes human creatures to a qualitatively new kind of participation in God's ongoing work of creation."*

In short, God created humans in His image and has invited us to participate in His ongoing work of creation, even though it is risky for Him to trust us with it. Humans don't exactly have the best track record. Still, He is constantly calling, inviting, and teaching us how to manage creation (and ourselves) well.

Read Jeremiah 29:5-6. Babylon is not Israel's home. It isn't meant to be. However, they are gonna be there for a while, so God is telling them to make the most of it. He wants them to take the time in exile and use it to practice the art of good stewardship. Build, plant, increase...

Application: This should remind us of another mandate from God found in Genesis 1:27-28. This is not justification for Christians to believe they have the right to conquer all nations and use natural resources for their own purposes without consideration of long term consequences. This is also not a statement of our right to define humanity in any other terms than what God created us to be. This is an invitation to reflect His divine creative spirit in the world through responsible and selfless stewardship of all of creation: Earth, animals, resources, and people.

God used Jeremiah to remind the Israelites in Babylon of their responsibility to Him, each other, and the rest of creation. It doesn't matter to God which nation's flag is flying above His people. What matters is that we live as His people wherever we are. We should practice responsible stewardship and make the world a better place wherever we find ourselves. We do this by living as His image to the best of our ability, by showing love, by cultivating the good fruit of His Spirit, and by flourishing wherever we are planted.

No work in the kingdom is wasted. Paul wrote: *“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Even in exile, we are called to be good stewards of creation (Earth, animals, relationships, community, and ourselves). When we can learn to live *in* this world but not *of* this world, we can put our trust in God’s plan for His people. We will not be overwhelmed by the fear and uncertainty bombarding us daily. We can put our efforts into increasing God’s Kingdom and cultivating His good fruit through all of creation. It is then that we will begin to live a life of Eudaimonia...and flourish.

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever considered that the sabbath was not only meant for mankind but also for the rest of God’s creation?
- What other reasons might God have apart from us?