

Hope and a Future

**A Curriculum for All Ages,
by the Reverend Dr. Daniel Rodriguez Schlorff**

**A Companion to the Hymn by Deanna Witkowski Based on
Jeremiah 29:1–14 | Commissioned for the 2026 Annual Meeting
and Conference of the National Association of Congregational
Christian Churches**

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord,
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope
and a future."*

— Jeremiah 29:11

A Word to Leaders and Teachers

This curriculum was written to accompany the hymn **“Hope and a Future,”** commissioned by the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches for its 2026 Annual Meeting and Conference. The hymn, composed by Deanna Witkowski, draws its heart and soul from **Jeremiah 29:1–14** — a letter written by the prophet Jeremiah to a people living in exile far from home.

It is important to say clearly at the outset: **this hymn and the scripture it is drawn from are not about the political issues of our current day.** The words of Jeremiah were addressed to a specific people — the Hebrew exiles living in Babylon — who were enduring a real and painful national catastrophe. The hymn faithfully reflects that original context: a community learning to hope, to pray, to plant seeds, to build homes, and to seek peace even in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile place.

What the scripture offers us is not a political program. It offers something far deeper: **a theology of hope** — the radical, patient, life-giving trust that God’s purposes cannot be stopped, even when the world around us feels like exile.

This curriculum is designed for **all ages** — children, youth, adults, and families worshipping together. Each section is written to be accessible and engaging, with stories, questions, activities, and moments of reflection that connect the ancient words to the living faith of your congregation. The hymn itself is central throughout. Sing it. Listen to it. Let its rhythms carry the message.

How to Use This Curriculum

This guide can be used in several ways:

All-Church Study — Use all four units across four weeks of intergenerational Christian education leading up to or following your conference.

Single Session — Use the “Gathering” unit for a one-hour, all-ages workshop on the day of the hymn’s debut.

Small Groups — Use the adult sections for small group Bible study alongside congregational singing.

Family Devotional — Use the “Family at Home” pages for devotional use across a week.

Each unit includes:

Scripture reading with context

Verse-by-verse engagement with the hymn

Activities for children (ages 4–10)

Discussion and reflection for youth (ages 11–17)

Study and conversation for adults

An intergenerational activity for families and
mixed-age groups

A prayer or benediction drawn from the hymn

The Hymn: “Hope and a Future”

Lyrics by Deanna Witkowski | Based on Jeremiah 29:1–

14

Verse 1

Where is our hope in a strange new land?

How do we live in peace?

With lies all around us and hatred in power,
can we protect the least?

Verse 2

How do we walk with our neighbor,

bring God’s joy into share?

We plant seeds of mercy and build homes of kindness,
of love and of care.

Verse 3

How do we pray when we can't feel,
when God seems so far away?
Yet we come — even in sorrow, even in fear —
to stand for tomorrow, we hear God say,

Chorus

“I will come to you, fulfill my good promise
to bring you back.
For I know, I know the plans I have for you,
plans to prosper and not to harm you,
to honor you:
to give you hope and a future.”

Refrain

Give you hope, to bring you joy,
to give you peace,
to give you hope and a future.

Part One: The Story Behind the Song

Understanding Jeremiah 29 — For All Ages

SETTING THE SCENE: What Happened to God's People?

Imagine waking up one morning and being told you had to leave your home. Not just your house — your town, your country, everything you knew. You couldn't take much with you. You didn't know the language where you were going. And the people who made you leave? They weren't kind about it.

That is what happened to thousands of Hebrew people around **597 BCE** — nearly 600 years before Jesus was born. The mighty empire of Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Jerusalem and carried the people of Judah into exile. Families were separated. The Temple — the most sacred place the Hebrew people knew,

the place where they believed God lived among them — was destroyed.

The people found themselves in **Babylon** (in what is now the country of Iraq). They were far from home, surrounded by a culture very different from their own, and many of them were asking a heartbreaking question:

Has God forgotten us?

WHO WAS JEREMIAH?

Jeremiah was a prophet — someone called by God to speak hard truths to the people. He had been warning Jerusalem for years that a crisis was coming. It wasn't popular work. People called him a liar and a traitor. He was thrown into a muddy pit. He wept so much over his people that he is sometimes called "**the weeping prophet.**"

But Jeremiah also carried a message of hope. And when the people were taken into exile, God told Jeremiah to do something unusual: **write them a letter.**

This letter is recorded in **Jeremiah 29:1–14**. It is the scripture on which the hymn “Hope and a Future” is based.

READ IT TOGETHER: Jeremiah 29:4–14

(Read aloud or assign parts — narrator, “God’s voice,” and congregation response)

Narrator: This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those he carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

God's Voice:

“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 prosper.”

Narrator: Then Jeremiah continues:

God's Voice:

“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and

come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and will bring you back from captivity."

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

WHAT WAS GOD ACTUALLY SAYING?

Let's break this letter down into plain language:

1. "Build houses and settle down."

God was not telling the exiles their hardship was over. God was saying: *You are here for a while. This is real. Don't pretend it isn't.* Make a life. Don't give up on living just because life is hard.

2. "Seek the peace of the city."

This is one of the most startling instructions in the entire letter. Babylon was the empire that had conquered them. And yet God said: *Pray for Babylon. Work for its flourishing. Because when it does well, you do well.* This was not a call to become like Babylon, but to be a blessing within it.

3. “I know the plans I have for you.”

False prophets were telling the exiles: “*Don’t worry — you’ll be home in two years!*” Jeremiah told the truth: the exile would last **seventy years**. Most of the people who received this letter would not live to see their return. This was not easy news. But alongside the hard truth, God offered the deepest of promises: *My plans for you are good. I have not forgotten you. There is a future.*

4. “You will seek me and find me.”

The exile would become, remarkably, a time of spiritual deepening. The Hebrew people would learn to worship without the Temple. They would collect and preserve their scriptures. Out of the crucible of suffering, their faith would

become something that could survive anywhere. God was not absent in Babylon. God was present — and findable — in the midst of it.

THE HYMN SPEAKS

Now sing or listen to **Verse 1** of “Hope and a Future”:

“Where is our hope in a strange new land?

How do we live in peace?

With lies all around us and hatred in power,

can we protect the least?”

Reflect: These words give voice to the questions the Hebrew exiles were asking. They were in a strange land. There were lies all around them — including false prophets who gave them easy answers instead of true ones. Power was in the hands of those who had oppressed them.

The hymn does not shy away from the difficulty. It begins with the real questions: **Where is our hope? How do we live?**

This is honest faith. It doesn't start with easy answers. It starts with the questions we carry in our hearts.

FOR CHILDREN (Ages 4–10): “A Letter from Far Away”

The Story

Tell this story aloud, or read it together:

Imagine your whole family had to move to a new place. You don't speak the language there. You miss your home, your church, your grandparents, your friends. And someone

you trust — a wise person in your family — sends you a letter.

The letter says: *“I know this is hard. Here’s what I want you to do: make a garden. Build a home. Be kind to your neighbors, even the ones who are different from you. And keep praying — because God has not forgotten you. God has good plans for you.”*

That’s the letter Jeremiah sent to God’s people in Babylon. It was a letter full of hard truth AND full of hope.

Activity: Write Your Own Letter of Hope

Materials needed: Paper, crayons or markers, envelopes (optional)

Instructions:

1. Think of someone you know who is going through a hard time — maybe they moved away, or they're sick, or they're sad.

2. Draw a picture or write a few sentences that say: *"I know this is hard. But here is one hopeful thing I want to say to you..."*

3. Share your letter with your group or take it home to mail or give to someone.

Sing together: As a group, sing the **Chorus** of "Hope and a Future." Point to these words: *"I know, I know the plans I have for you."* Ask: **Who is speaking those words in the song?** (God!) **What does God promise?** (*To give us hope and a future!*)

Simple Questions for Children:

Have you ever moved to a new place? How did it feel?

What would you miss most if you had to leave your home?

What does it feel like to know that someone has
good plans for you?

If God was writing *you* a letter right now, what do
you think it might say?

FOR YOUTH (Ages 11–17): “Staying Faithful When It’s Hard”

Context and Connection

The people of Judah didn’t end up in Babylon by accident. Jeremiah had been warning them: when a community stops caring for the poor, when leaders abuse their power, when people worship things that are not God — there are consequences. The exile was real, and painful, and not something the people had expected or wanted.

And then God's letter arrived, and it said something no one expected: *Don't run from this. Build a life here. Seek the peace of this place. And trust that I haven't left you.*

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to "make the best of it" even when you didn't choose it? What was that like?

2. The false prophets told the exiles what they *wanted* to hear: "You'll be home soon!" Jeremiah told them the hard truth. Why do you think people sometimes prefer comfortable lies to difficult truths?

3. God told the exiles to "seek the peace" of the city that had conquered them. That's a radical idea. What do you think that would look like in practice?

4. The hymn asks: *"How do we walk with our neighbor, bring God's joy into share?"* Who are the "neighbors" in your own life that might feel like strangers to you?

Dig Into the Hymn: Verse 2

“How do we walk with our neighbor,

bring God’s joy into share?

We plant seeds of mercy and build homes of kindness,

of love and of care.”

Activity: “Seeds of Mercy” Mapping

On a large piece of paper, draw a map of your community — your school, your neighborhood, your congregation. Now mark:

Places where people might feel like “exiles” — lonely, forgotten, or left out.

One thing your group could do in each of those places to “plant a seed of mercy.”

Share your maps and discuss: What would it look like for your church to be a blessing in your community the way God called the exiles to be a blessing in Babylon?

A Word About What This Scripture Is NOT

The words of Jeremiah 29:11 are sometimes quoted as a personal promise that life will always work out the way we want it to. That's a misreading of the text. These words were written to **a whole community** enduring a **specific historical suffering** — the loss of their homeland, their Temple, and their freedom.

The hope Jeremiah offers is not a guarantee of personal comfort. It is something harder and more beautiful: **the promise that God's purposes are larger than our suffering**, and that even in the midst of exile — literal or figurative — God is at work.

Reflection: What does it mean to trust in God's goodness not because life is easy, but *even when* life is hard?

FOR ADULTS: “Exile as Spiritual Formation”

A Study on Jeremiah 29 and the Theology of Hope

Reading the Text in Context

Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most quoted verses in contemporary Christian devotion. It appears on coffee mugs, graduation cards, and social media posts. This is not necessarily a problem — the verse carries genuine power — but it is worth pausing to ask: *What was God actually saying, and to whom?*

The letter of Jeremiah 29 was written to the first wave of exiles taken to Babylon in **597 BCE**, before the final destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. These were not the poorest or most marginalized members of Judean society —

they were largely the educated, skilled, and priestly classes. They were people of influence who found themselves suddenly powerless.

Several things are notable about God's letter through Jeremiah:

1. It contradicted the popular prophets.

Multiple prophets in Babylon were telling the exiles that the captivity would be short — perhaps two years — and that they should not “settle in.” Jeremiah's letter directly countered this message. He named specific false prophets by name (Jeremiah 29:21–23). The truth was unwelcome: the exile would last seventy years.

2. It commanded engagement, not withdrawal.

The instinct of an exiled community is often to withdraw — to form an enclave, to maintain strict separation from the surrounding culture, to wait for rescue. God's letter

commanded the opposite: build homes, plant gardens, raise families, and *seek the shalom of the city*. The Hebrew word **shalom** means far more than “peace” — it encompasses wholeness, justice, flourishing, and right relationship.

3. It promised presence, not absence.

The destruction of the Temple would have felt, to ancient minds, like the departure of God. Temples were where deities lived. But God’s letter insists: *I am here. Seek me. You will find me*. This is a profound theological development — the understanding that God is not confined to a building, a nation, or a religious system. God is findable in Babylon.

4. It spoke to a community, not just individuals.

The “you” throughout Jeremiah 29 is plural — addressed to a people, a community, a congregation. The plans God declares are communal plans. The hope is a shared hope. This is worth holding onto: the promises of

scripture are not merely personal assurances but invitations to live together as a community of hope.

The Hymn as Theological Statement

Deanna Witkowski's hymn "Hope and a Future" does something theologically sophisticated: it gives voice to **the questions** of the exiles before it offers the answers. The first three verses are structured as interrogatives — *Where? How? How?* — before the chorus delivers the divine response.

This is the structure of lament in the Psalms: the honest cry *before* the declaration of trust. The hymn does not leap past the difficulty to easy resolution. It sits with the real questions of a people in distress, and then — only then — lets God speak.

Verse 3 is particularly rich:

*“How do we pray when we can’t feel,
when God seems so far away?
Yet we come — even in sorrow, even in fear —
to stand for tomorrow, we hear God say...”*

This is the movement from lament to trust. It does not say *God will feel close*. It says: *We come anyway*. This is mature, hard-won faith — the faith of Jeremiah himself, who prayed and argued and wept and still kept speaking God’s word.

Discussion Questions for Adults:

1. When have you personally experienced a season that felt like “exile” — a time when life did not unfold as you expected and you wondered about God’s presence and purposes?
2. The command to “seek the shalom of the city” required the exiles to work for the flourishing of the

very empire that had oppressed them. This is not the same as endorsing Babylon's values or pretending the oppression didn't happen. How do you hold together the call to seek community flourishing *and* the call to resist injustice?

3. How do you distinguish between **sentimental optimism** ("everything will work out fine") and **biblical hope** ("God's purposes cannot ultimately be defeated")? What difference does that distinction make in practice?

4. The false prophets offered comfort. Jeremiah offered truth. Both seemed to speak in God's name. How does your community discern between messages that genuinely reflect God's word and messages that simply tell us what we want to hear?

5. The hymn moves from questions to the voice of God speaking. Have you experienced a moment in

worship — perhaps through music, scripture, or community — where you felt you heard God's answer breaking through? What was that like?

A Note on Congregational Use

This hymn was written for corporate worship. Its call-and-response structure — questions in the verses, God's answer in the chorus — is designed to be sung *together*. When a congregation raises the questions and then together sings the chorus as God's response, something theological happens: the community enacts the very movement from lament to trust that Jeremiah's letter describes.

Consider: What would it mean for your congregation to sing this hymn not just as a performance, but as a **corporate act of faith** — a communal declaration that even in hard seasons, we trust in God's good purposes?

Part Two: The Heart of the Letter

Jeremiah 29:11 — A Closer Look

FOR ALL AGES: “What Does Hope Feel Like?”

Before we study the verse, let’s start with experience.

Opening Activity (All Ages Together):

Give everyone a small piece of paper. Ask them to write or draw (for younger children) their answer to this question:

“What is one thing you are hoping for right now?”

Collect the papers and read a few aloud (with permission). Notice the range:

Children might hope for something concrete and
near

Teenagers might hope for something social or
vocational

Adults might carry hopes that have been deferred
for years

Older adults might carry a hope that has been
transformed by loss

After reading several, pause and say: **“The people of Judah in Babylon had hopes too — for home, for family, for God’s presence. Jeremiah 29:11 is what God said into the middle of their hoping.”**

UNPACKING THE VERSE: Word by Word

Read Jeremiah 29:11 aloud slowly:

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Let’s look at each phrase:

“For I know...”

The word “know” in Hebrew (*yada*) is a deep word. It means intimate knowledge — not just intellectual awareness, but relational knowing. The same word is used of a shepherd who knows each sheep by name, or of a parent who knows their child’s cry in the night. God says: *I know you. I know your situation. I know what is ahead.*

“...the plans I have for you...”

The Hebrew word for “plans” (*machashavot*) also means “thoughts” or “intentions.” These are not vague wishes — they are deliberate, thought-through purposes. God has

been thinking about this people. They are not an afterthought.

“...declares the LORD...”

This is the prophetic formula that signals: *this is not Jeremiah’s opinion. This is God’s word.* It is a claim of authority and source.

“...plans for welfare and not for evil...”

The word translated “welfare” is **shalom** — that rich Hebrew word meaning wholeness, peace, justice, right relationship, flourishing. God’s plans are *shalom* plans. And they are explicitly *not* plans for harm (*ra’ah* in Hebrew, meaning disaster, evil, ruin).

“...to give you a future and a hope.”

The word “future” (*acharit*) literally means “that which comes after” — an end, a destination, a completion. God is saying: *There is an “after” to this story. Your story is not*

finished. There is an end that I am bringing you toward. And the word “hope” (tiqvah) carries within it the image of a thread or cord held taut — something to hold onto that is attached to something solid.

Taken together: **God knows this people intimately, has deliberate purposes for them, purposes that lead toward wholeness — and there is a future, a real destination, and something to hold onto along the way.**

FOR CHILDREN: “The Hope Thread”

Object Lesson: Bring a ball of bright yarn or string to class.

Tell the story:

“The Hebrew word for *hope* in this verse is *tiqvah* — and it’s related to the image of a thread or cord. Imagine you’re in a dark cave, and someone outside is holding one end of a long rope. You hold the other end. Even when you can’t see the light, even when you can’t hear the person at the other end — as long as you’re holding that rope, you know you’re connected. You know the way out is there.

That’s what hope is in the Bible. It’s not just a feeling — it’s a connection. A cord. Something that holds you to something real.”

Activity: Have children sit in a circle. Hold one end of the yarn and pass the ball to the next person, who wraps it around their wrist and passes it on. When the circle is complete, everyone is connected. Ask: “What happens if one person lets go?” (The circle breaks.) “What happens when we hold on together?” (We stay connected.)

Talk about: “God promises to be the one holding the other end of the cord. We hold on. That’s what hope is.”

Sing together: Sing the **Refrain** of “Hope and a Future”:

“Give you hope, to bring you joy, to give you peace, to give you hope and a future.”

Ask: **What three things does God promise?** (*Hope, joy, peace!*) Point out: these are not things that only happen when life is easy. They are gifts God gives us *even* in hard times.

FOR YOUTH: “The Seventy-Year Wait”

Here’s the part of the story that doesn’t show up on the coffee mugs.

God’s promise in Jeremiah 29:11 came with a timeline: **seventy years**. Most of the people who received Jeremiah’s

letter would not live to see the return from exile. They would plant gardens they would never harvest. They would have children who would grow up never knowing the land of their grandparents.

The promise was real. The hope was genuine. But it was a hope that required **patient endurance** across generations.

Discussion:

1. How do you feel about a promise that is true but whose fulfillment you might not see in your lifetime?

2. Think about someone in your family or congregation who planted “seeds” — of faith, of service, of prayer — that *you* are now benefiting from. What did their long-term faithfulness mean for your life?

3. The hymn's chorus is sung in God's voice: "*I will come to you, fulfill my good promise to bring you back.*" This language echoes across the whole Bible — from the Exodus to the Resurrection. What does it mean to trust a God whose promises sometimes take generations to unfold?

Activity: "Letters Across Time"

Write two letters:

1. A letter **from** a Hebrew exile in Babylon to their grandchildren who will see the return: "*You will come home someday. Here is what I want you to know about hope...*"

2. A letter **to yourself** ten years from now: "*Here is what I am hoping and trusting God for, even if I can't see it yet...*"

Share in small groups or take home.

Part Three: Building Lives in a Strange Land

The Verses of the Hymn as a Guide to Faithful Living

THE HYMN AS A ROADMAP

Each verse of “Hope and a Future” carries one of the great themes of Jeremiah’s letter. Let’s walk through all three verses together and see how they map to the scripture.

VERSE 1: The Question of Orientation

“Where is our hope in a strange new land?

How do we live in peace?

With lies all around us and hatred in power,

can we protect the least?”

Scripture connection: Jeremiah 29:4–7

The exiles arrive in a foreign land with false voices all around them. The first question is: *Where do we orient ourselves? Where is our hope?*

The Question for Us: The hymn does not tell us who the “least” are in our context — it invites *us* to name them. In Babylon, the least were the most vulnerable exiles: children, the elderly, those without social capital. In Jeremiah’s broader writing, the “least” always includes widows, orphans, and foreigners.

For All Ages — “Who Are the Least?” Circle Discussion:

Sit in a circle. Pass an object (a stone, a candle, a small cross) around. Each person answers:

“In our community, who might feel left out, forgotten, or unprotected?”

Listen without commentary. After everyone has spoken, pray together: *“Lord, help us see who you see. Help us protect who you protect.”*

VERSE 2: The Practice of Hope

*“How do we walk with our neighbor,
bring God’s joy into share?*

*We plant seeds of mercy and build homes of kindness,
of love and of care.”*

Scripture connection: Jeremiah 29:5–7

This verse answers the question of Verse 1 with action. The exiles are told to *build* and *plant* — to invest in relationships and community. Hope is not passive. It is practiced.

The language of planting and building runs throughout the Bible as a metaphor for patient, long-term faithfulness. You plant a seed today knowing that someone else — maybe someone not yet born — will eat the fruit. You build a house today knowing that future generations will live in it.

Activity: “Seeds and Stones” (All Ages)

Materials: Small smooth stones, permanent markers, a common bowl or basket, seeds (bean seeds or sunflower seeds work well)

Instructions:

Give each person a stone and a seed.

On the stone, write or draw one **act of kindness** you will do this week — one “seed of mercy” you will plant.

Place the stone in the common bowl as a sign of commitment.

Take the seed home and plant it somewhere — a pot, a garden, a patch of soil — as a reminder that hope is grown over time.

Pray together:

“God of the garden and the building site, teach us to plant when we cannot see the harvest, and to build when we cannot see the future. Give us the faith of those who plant seeds for others to enjoy. Amen.”

VERSE 3: The Courage to Pray

*“How do we pray when we can’t feel,
when God seems so far away?
Yet we come — even in sorrow, even in fear —
to stand for tomorrow, we hear God say...”*

Scripture connection: Jeremiah 29:12–13

“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

The third verse addresses what may be the hardest question in faith: **What do we do when prayer feels hollow? When God seems distant?**

Jeremiah’s answer — and the hymn’s answer — is not a theological explanation. It is an invitation: **Come anyway.** The exile is not the end of prayer; it is the beginning of a deeper kind of prayer. The kind that doesn’t depend on feeling the presence of God, but shows up in the dark and waits.

Adult Reflection:

The mystic tradition calls this “the dark night of the soul” — seasons when God seems absent, when prayer feels

like shouting into silence. The Psalms are full of it: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Psalm 22:1 — the very words Jesus cried from the cross.)

The invitation of Jeremiah 29 is not to pretend the silence isn’t real, but to show up in it anyway. *“Yet we come — even in sorrow, even in fear.”*

Youth Activity: “Prayer Even When It’s Hard”

Give each person a piece of paper. Ask them to write at the top: **“God, I’m having trouble feeling you right now because...”**

Then finish it privately. They do not have to share unless they choose to.

After a moment of silence, read aloud Jeremiah 29:13:
“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Invite anyone who wants to share what it might mean to
“seek with all your heart” even when you can’t feel
anything.

Close by singing Verse 3 of the hymn together slowly.

Part Four: The Chorus

God Speaks — and We Sing Back

THE TURNING POINT IN THE HYMN

The entire structure of “Hope and a Future” builds
toward the Chorus — the moment when God’s voice breaks
through:

"I will come to you, fulfill my good promise

to bring you back.

For I know, I know the plans I have for you,

plans to prosper and not to harm you,

to honor you:

to give you hope and a future."

Notice the words that are *added* in the hymn beyond the verse: **"to honor you."** This is a profound pastoral touch. The exiles did not feel honored. They felt defeated, ashamed, forgotten. And yet: God says, *My plans are to honor you*. To restore dignity. To lift heads that have been bowed low.

The Refrain then echoes and deepens:

"Give you hope, to bring you joy, to give you peace,

to give you hope and a future."

Hope. Joy. Peace. These are the three great gifts of God's future — and they are not sequential (first hope, then joy, then peace) but simultaneous. Together they form the tapestry of **shalom** — the wholeness that God has been planning all along.

FOR ALL AGES: "God Speaks in the Chorus"

Musical Activity: Divide your group into two sections. Designate one side as "the exiles" — they will sing the **Verses**, the questions. Designate the other side as "God's voice" — they will sing the **Chorus**.

Walk through the hymn together:

Exiles sing: *"Where is our hope in a strange new land?"*

God's voice responds: *"I will come to you, fulfill my good promise..."*

After singing, discuss:

What does it feel like to “be” the one asking the questions?

What does it feel like to “be” the one speaking the promise?

In your own life, when have you felt like you were asking the question — and when have you felt the answer?

Key Teaching: The structure of the hymn mirrors the structure of faith itself. We ask our questions honestly. We bring our fears. We even say, *“God seems so far away.”* And then — not because the problems are solved, but because God’s word is trustworthy — we hear the answer. And we sing it together.

This is what worship does: it moves us from honest lament to grounded trust.

A LITURGICAL MOMENT: Reading the Letter

For Use in Worship or Group Closing:

Have a leader read the following as a dramatic reading, pausing where indicated. Invite the congregation to respond with the Refrain of the hymn after each section.

Leader: To all of you who find yourselves in a strange land — far from what you knew, unsure of what comes next — God says:

“Build your life here. Plant something. Make a home.

Do not let the strangeness of this place stop you from living.”

All sing: *"Give you hope, to bring you joy, to give you peace,
to give you hope and a future."*

Leader: To all of you who have neighbors you don't
understand, communities that feel complicated,
relationships that take more than you have —

"Seek the peace of this place. Pray for it. Work for it.

Because when it flourishes, you flourish."

All sing: *"Give you hope, to bring you joy, to give you peace,
to give you hope and a future."*

Leader: To all of you who have prayed and heard
nothing, who have waited and seen nothing, who have
hoped and been disappointed —

"Seek me. You will find me.

I know where you are. I know what you need.

I know the plans I have for you.”

All sing: *“Give you hope, to bring you joy, to give you peace,
to give you hope and a future.”*

Leader: And to all of you who wonder whether the story
ends well — whether the exile is the final word —

“I will come to you. I will fulfill my good promise.

My plans are for your welfare, not your ruin.

To give you a future. To give you hope.”

All sing (full Chorus):

“I will come to you, fulfill my good promise to bring you back.

For I know, I know the plans I have for you,

plans to prosper and not to harm you, to honor you:

to give you hope and a future.”

Part Five: Living the Promise Together

Family and Intergenerational Activities

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL: “Five Days with Jeremiah 29:11”

Use this devotional at home across a week. Each day takes 10–15 minutes and is designed for families with children of mixed ages.

Day 1: The Exile Story

Read together: Jeremiah 29:1–7 (or the summary in Part One of this curriculum)

Talk about:

“If your family had to move to a completely new place tomorrow, what would be hardest?”

“What would you do to make it feel like home?”

Do together: Draw a picture of your home — the things that make it “home.” Talk about: What makes a place feel like home? Is it the building? The people? The routines? Something else?

Pray: “God, thank you for the places we call home. Be close to people everywhere who are far from home tonight. Amen.”

Sing: Verse 1 of “Hope and a Future”

Day 2: The Strange Command

Read together: Jeremiah 29:7 — “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city...”

Talk about:

“Can you think of a time you had to be kind to someone who had been unkind to you?”

“What would it look like to ‘seek the peace’ of your school? Your neighborhood?”

Do together: Make a list of three people or places in your community where you could be a blessing this week. Choose one and plan how to do it.

Pray: “God, help us to be peacemakers even when it’s hard. Show us where to plant seeds of kindness today. Amen.”

Sing: Verse 2 of “Hope and a Future”

Day 3: Honest Prayer

Read together: Jeremiah 29:12–13

Talk about:

“Has there ever been a time when you prayed
and it felt like God wasn’t listening?”

“What did you do? Did you keep praying?”

Do together: Each family member writes or draws one honest prayer — something they really want to say to God, even if it’s hard or uncertain. Read them aloud as a family, then say together: *“We come to you anyway, God. Even when we can’t feel you. You promised to be found.”*

Sing: Verse 3 of “Hope and a Future”

Day 4: The Promise

Read together: Jeremiah 29:11

Talk about:

“What does ‘hope’ feel like in your body? Where do you feel it?”

“What is one thing you are hoping God will do — even if it takes a long time?”

Do together: Plant something together — seeds in a pot, a bulb in the ground, a cutting in water. As you plant, say together: “We are trusting God’s good plans, even when we can’t see the growth yet.”

Sing: The full Chorus of “Hope and a Future” — slowly, as a family prayer.

Day 5: Passing it On

Read together: The full passage, Jeremiah 29:1–14

Talk about:

“Who in your family or community has shown you what patient, long-term hope looks like?”

“What do you want to pass on to the next generation?”

Do together: Write a “family letter of hope” — something your family believes about God’s goodness, written as if you were writing it to your future grandchildren. Keep it somewhere special.

Sing: The full hymn — all verses, chorus, and refrain.

Close with prayer:

“God of the exiles and the homecoming, God of the long wait and the faithful promise — we trust that you know us, that you have plans for us, that there is a future you are bringing us toward. Help us to plant, to build, to pray, and to hope — together. Give us hope and a future, as you promised. Amen.”

Part Six: Bringing It All Together

Worship Resources and Closing Reflection

HYMN STUDY GUIDE: “Hope and a Future” in Worship

When to Use This Hymn:

“Hope and a Future” is suited for worship occasions including:

Times of congregational transition or uncertainty

Memorial and grief services where the promise of God's future is needed

Commissioning services for missionaries, church planters, or outgoing leaders

Annual meeting celebrations of God's faithfulness

Seasons of Advent (waiting for fulfillment) and Pentecost (the Spirit's empowering presence)

Any service in which the congregation is invited to bring its real questions to God

Liturgical Notes:

The hymn's structure (questions in verses, God's voice in chorus) makes it ideal for antiphonal singing — congregation and choir, or two halves of the congregation.

The Refrain (*"Give you hope, to bring you joy, to give you peace..."*) can be used as a standalone congregational response throughout a service.

The Chorus can be sung as an a cappella moment, allowing the congregation to hear God's voice in the silence of instruments.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY FOR ALL AGES

For young children (3–6): Say together and practice with motions:

"I know the plans I have for you — (point to head)

*plans to give you hope — (make a heart shape with hands)**

*and a future!" (reach both arms upward)**

*— God (Jeremiah 29:11)**

For older children and youth:

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD,
plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

— Jeremiah 29:11

For adults: Memorize the full verse in context with Jeremiah 29:12–13: *“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

CLOSING PRAYER FOR LEADERS

*To be read at the close of any unit, session, or service using
this curriculum:*

God of the long waiting and the sure promise,
you have written your hope into the bones of your
people
across thousands of years.

You wrote it in a letter to exiles in Babylon.

You wrote it in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

You write it still in the songs we sing together.

Send us out from this place

as people who plant seeds they may not harvest,

who build homes they may not inhabit,

who pray even when the silence is deep,

who seek the peace of every place they find themselves

—

because they know, they know,

that you have plans for them.

Plans for welfare and not for evil.

Plans to give them a future and a hope.

May we sing it until we believe it.

May we believe it until we live it.

May we live it until the whole world sees

that you are the God who keeps your promises.

In the name of the One who is our Hope and our Future,

Amen.

Appendix A: A Brief Note on Context and Interpretation

What Jeremiah 29:11 Is NOT

Because this verse appears so frequently in popular culture, it is worth gently naming what the verse does not mean:

It is not a personal promise that your specific plans will succeed. The “you” is plural and communal — addressed to a whole exiled people, not a lone individual.

It is not a guarantee of material prosperity. The people who first received this promise spent decades in exile before the fulfillment came.

It is not a message about contemporary political situations. The hymn and the scripture address the specific historical suffering of the Hebrew people under Babylonian captivity — not the political debates of any modern nation.

It is not a promise that suffering will end quickly. The fulfillment took seventy years. It was a hope for generations, not a quick fix.

What Jeremiah 29:11 IS

A revelation of God’s character: God is one whose plans are oriented toward shalom — wholeness and flourishing — for God’s people.

A call to patient, active trust: Trust that is expressed not in passive waiting but in building, planting, praying, and seeking peace.

A communal promise: Addressed to a people, it invites us to hold hope together, in community, across generations.

An anchor in suffering: Not a removal of suffering, but the assurance that suffering is not the final word — that there is a future God is bringing us toward.

Appendix B: Recommended Resources for Further Study

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Longman, Tremper III. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*.
New International Biblical Commentary.
Hendrickson, 2008.

Shead, Andrew G. *A Mouth Full of Fire: The Word
of God in the Words of Jeremiah*. IVP Academic, 2012.

Peterson, Eugene. *Run with the Horses: The Quest
for Life at Its Best*. InterVarsity Press, 1983 (a pastoral
engagement with Jeremiah).

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read
the Bible for All Its Worth*. Zondervan (for
understanding prophetic literature).

“Hope and a Future” — A Curriculum for All Ages

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(NIV) and the English Standard Version (ESV).*