

Devotional Guide

September 21–26, 2026

Hope In the Promises #1



When the House Isn't Home

The only hope for coming home is on
the shoulders of Jesus.

Speaker: Mike Kleven, Lead Pastor

Bible Text(s): Jeremiah 29:4-14; Nehemiah 9:35-37; Luke 15:1-7

The message explores what it means to live in exile—cut off from the place you belonged, carrying the wound of being away from home. You can live in the house and still not be home. Jeremiah 29 speaks to people God sent to Babylon because of their sin: build lives where you are, do not dwindle away, and trust the plans God has for a future filled with hope.

Nehemiah 9 shows that returning to rebuilt walls did not yet mean freedom. Luke 15 reveals how God keeps that promise: Jesus searches for the lost sheep, lifts the found one onto His shoulders, and brings the exile home.

The Big Idea is clear: The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

How to Use This Guide:

Set aside 10-15 minutes daily. Read the Bible, reflect on the thought, answer questions, pray, and take the action step. Commit to this for growth—journal insights and share with a friend for accountability.

Keep this guide close this week. Return to the Big Idea each day: The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

Day 1: When the House Isn't Home

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 29:4-7

Jeremiah 29:4-7 (NIV) "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. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.'"

Devotional Thought:

The sermon named a wound many of us know. The last child leaves. A chair sits empty after the funeral. You are still in the house, but it is not home. Exile means "away from the earth that was yours." Exiles do not fully assimilate. They wait for a change so they can go home. Sometimes exile is internal: you are in your place, but you no longer belong.

God's people in Babylon felt that dislocation. Yet God did not tell them to freeze until the seventy years ended. He told them to build, plant, marry, grow, and bless the city where He sent them. The Big Idea does not deny the ache. It names the only way the ache is healed: The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What picture of "house but not home" from the sermon landed closest to your life?**
- 2. How does Jeremiah 29:4-7 describe faithful living while you still wait?**
- 3. Where have you been dwindling—pulling back, waiting to live until things feel like home again?**
- 4. What would it look like to seek the peace of the place God has you right now?**
- 5. How does the Big Idea give hope when the house still doesn't feel like home?**

1. Prayer Prompt:

Lord, You see the rooms that no longer feel like home. Meet me in this exile. Teach me to build and to hope while I wait. Amen.

Action Step:

Name one place that feels like a house but not a home. Pray Jeremiah 29:7 over it, then do one small act that blesses that place today.

Day 2: Sent, Not Stranded

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 29:8-14

Jeremiah 29:11-14 (NIV) “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.’”

Devotional Thought:

Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most famous—and most misquoted—promises in the Bible. It was not first written for a graduation card. It was spoken to people in pain, dislocated from their place, serving a seventy-year sentence. God says even in the punishment He has good plans, a hope-filled future that starts now. False prophets sold shortcuts. God told His people not to listen. Most of them would not personally walk back through Jerusalem’s gates. The promise was still true.

God sent them into exile, but God did not abandon them. He listens. He makes Himself available to those who cry out from the core of who they are. When a heart turns to God, He begins to reverse the plight. The Big Idea holds here too: The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus—not on a huckster’s timeline.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What does Jeremiah 29:11 promise when you read it as a word to exiles?**
- 2. Where are you tempted to listen for a shortcut instead of seeking God with all your heart?**
- 3. How does “I will listen to you” change the way you pray from a hard place?**
- 4. What would seeking God with all your heart look like this week?**
- 5. How does this promise keep you from dwindling away where you are?**

Prayer Prompt:

Father, I call on You from this place. I seek You with all my heart. Be found by me. Give me a future filled with hope. Amen.

Action Step:

Write Jeremiah 29:11-13 on a card. Read it slowly three times today, then pray verse 13 out loud.

Day 3: Slaves in the Land of Promise

Bible Reading: Nehemiah 9:35-37

Nehemiah 9:36-37 (NIV) “But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.”

Devotional Thought:

Seventy years later God kept His word. Jews returned. Walls rose. The Torah was read and the people wept. Then the leaders prayed through Israel’s whole story and landed on the present: “So today we are slaves!” The Babylonian exile had ended, but the Persian banner still flew. From that day until Jesus was born, empire after empire ruled Jerusalem. They were in their houses. They were not in the Home.

The sermon pressed the point onto us. If Jesus is not the King of your heart, do not be fooled—another empire rules over you. Money, sex, and power/control still look like pretty houses. They only deliver slavery. The rebuilt wall cannot do what only the Shepherd can do. The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why can people be back in the land and still cry, “We are slaves”?**
- 2. What “empire” most often rules your body, time, or decisions?**
- 3. How does Nehemiah 9:35 connect unfaithfulness with this ongoing distress?**
- 4. Where have you settled for a nicer house instead of true home?**
- 5. What would it mean for Jesus to be King of that room of your heart?**

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, I do not want a prettier slavery. Expose the empire that still rules me. Be King of my heart today. Amen.

Action Step:

Identify one “pretty house” (money, image, control, comfort) that has been ruling you. Confess it to God and one trusted person.

Day 4: The Promise Kept in Jesus

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 29:14; Luke 4:18-19

Jeremiah 29:14 (NIV) “I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.” Luke 4:18-19 (NIV) “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor... to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Devotional Thought:

Daniel learned the exile would not be seventy years only. It would be seventy weeks of years—490 years—until punishment for sins was finished and forgiveness began. When that time arrived, God started bringing lost people back to the place they belong: their true home in Jesus. In Jesus, God is setting the world right. In Jesus, punishment for sins is finished. In Jesus, forgiveness is offered. In Jesus, exile is ending.

This is not only Israel’s story. Sin separates each of us from God and makes us exiles from the life He created us to live. God did not abandon His people in Babylon. He does not abandon you. The Big Idea is the kept promise: The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. How does Jeremiah 29:14 describe what God does when people seek Him?**
- 2. What changes when you hear “gather” and “bring back” as words Jesus fulfills?**
- 3. Where do you still feel scattered, lost, or far from God?**
- 4. How does forgiveness in Jesus end a kind of exile that walls and houses cannot?**
- 5. Who around you still needs to hear that the gathering has begun?**

Prayer Prompt:

Jesus, You are the kept promise. Finish in me what walls could never finish. Gather my scattered heart and bring me home. Amen.

Action Step:

Thank God out loud for one specific way Jesus has already begun bringing you home. Then text that thanks to a friend.

Day 5: The Shepherd in the Wild

Bible Reading: Luke 15:1-7

Luke 15:4-6 (NIV) “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’”

Devotional Thought:

Tax collectors and sinners—the ostracized, silenced, shunned—were coming to hear Jesus. Religious leaders complained that He welcomed them and ate with them. So Jesus told a story. The shepherd does not send a better map. He enters the wild, finds the one who wandered, and lifts her onto his shoulders. That is the moment she has found her true home.

Sheep wander looking for sweeter grass or freedom from the shepherd. Life without Him is dangerous. If you have strayed, run back. No one knows you better or cares for you more. If you are not yet following Jesus, hear this: a God who is searching for you is different from the god you walked away from. The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What stands out to you about the people who came near Jesus in Luke 15:1?**
- 2. Why is being carried home better news than being handed a map?**
- 3. Where have you wandered looking for “the good life” apart from the Shepherd?**
- 4. What would it mean to stop fighting and let Jesus lift you today?**
- 5. Who in your life still feels like an outsider God is already searching for?**

Prayer Prompt:

Jesus, You came into the wild for me. I stop running. Lift me onto Your shoulders and carry me home. Amen.

Action Step:

Read Luke 15:4-7 out loud. Then sit quietly for two minutes and picture Jesus lifting you. Tell Him yes.

Day 6: Coming Home on His Shoulders

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 29:13; John 10:11, 14-15

Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV) “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” John 10:11, 14-15 (NIV) “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Devotional Thought:

Review the week: a house that is not home, a promise spoken in exile, slaves still living in the land, a gathering that begins in Jesus, and a Shepherd who walks into the wild. Storms still rage. Wolves still howl. Nothing can take you from the grip of the Shepherd once He has you. The home you have always belonged to is not a prettier room. It is life with God in Jesus.

Today can be the day you find your true home. Seek Him with all your heart. He is available. He is searching. He is ready to put you on His shoulders and carry you home. Live the Big Idea: The only hope for coming home is on the shoulders of Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What key insight are you taking from this week’s readings?**
- 2. How has your view of “home” changed?**
- 3. Where will you apply the Big Idea in the coming week?**
- 4. Who could you welcome the way Jesus welcomed sinners in Luke 15?**
- 5. How will you keep seeking the Lord with all your heart after this guide ends?**

Prayer Prompt:

Loving Father, thank You for never abandoning Your people in exile. Thank You for Jesus, the Shepherd who carries us home. Keep me on His shoulders. Amen.

Action Step:

Memorize Jeremiah 29:11 this week. Share one takeaway from this guide with a friend or family member today.



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