

Embracing Exile

Living Faithfully as God's Unique People

Richard Leslie Parrott

Our Study Book:

***Embracing Exile:
Living Faithfully as God's Unique People in the World***
By Dr. Scott Daniels

Exile can be a frightening prospect. Like the Israelites in Babylon, Christians today may feel they are in unfamiliar territory, surrounded by a culture with customs and practices foreign to their faith. In these times of dislocation and powerlessness, God wants to help his people experience anew the possibilities of covenantal faithfulness. In *Embracing Exile*, T. Scott Daniels invites the church to embrace this modern time of 'exile' and to seize this unique opportunity to be a blessing to the culture around us (Amazon.com).

We will be studying the biblical theme of Exile for the four weeks leading up to Lent:

February 10, 17, 24, and March 3

The study is a natural follow-up to the Pastor's series "*All Things New*." Our guide for the study will be Scott Daniel's book, *Embracing Exile*. The author has also provided a guide for small group discussion that includes Dr. Daniel's videos. These resources will help you prepare discussion questions for your class.

This short introduction to the study places in your hand two items that are explained in this short introduction to the series:

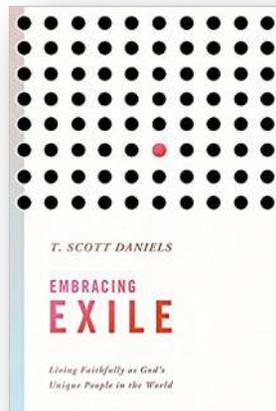
On Page 2, you will find a few directions on using the book and discussion guide to prepare for your class discussions.

On Page 4, you will also find a few recourses on the theological and biblical meaning of Exile that will help get you started.

Preparing to Lead Your Class in Discussion

You will receive a copy of the study book and the discussion guide as well as access to Dr. Daniel's videos.

RESOURCE #1: A copy of the study book (hard copy). I read the book last summer at the suggestion of Pastor Diehl. *I like it!* It is practical, theological, and biblical. Scott Daniels is one of the best preachers and writers in our denomination. He is on a plain with Dr. Boone.



My recommendation for your preparation for guiding the study is to read each chapter, think about it, and write down three to five ideas that you believe your class could meaningfully discuss.

RESOURCE #2: A copy of the Small Group Discussion Guide (PDF). Pastor Deihl has obtained a copy of the discussion guide in PDF form that is available to you. (The guide will be sent to you from the Church office.) This is a great resource. In the discussion guide, you will find everything you need to complete your preparation for leading your class discussion. The guide presents the 1-Topic, 2-Scriptures, and 3-Questions for each chapter in the book.



1-Topic Summary: The guide suggests that each person in the group read the assigned chapter before class. This may not be reasonable for your class. However, each chapter is summarized in the discussion guide, "Topic Summary." Combine

this summary with the 3-5 items you found most helpful in the chapter and you have an excellent overview of the chapter. This will give the class enough information to be able to discuss the material.

2-Related Scriptures: The guide provides excellent scriptural resources. As you prepare your lesson, I recommend that you read the scriptures and take them to heart. See if you find anything in the Scriptures that connect to the 3-5 items you found most helpful in the chapter. Also, Dr. Daniel's has prepared a video that will help you prepare. The portal to the videos will be sent to you from the Church.

3-Questions: The "Introductory Questions" are easy to adapt to your class. The "Digging Deeper" questions will form the major portion of your class discussion. You don't need to use all the questions. You may find that the 3-5 areas you discovered in your reading will make their way into the questions you ask. I have included the hints and tips found on the Stanford University site for "Designing Effective Discussion Questions."

teachingcommons.stanford.edu

Designing Effective Discussion Questions

Asking Good Questions Overview

A good question is both answerable and challenging. Below are several types of questions and suggestions about when to use which kind. You'll also find useful information on how to manage group dynamics.

Where to Begin?

Experienced instructors learn to prepare a mix of questions— those that are easily answered, slightly challenging, or highly complex—that they can draw on as the discussion develops.

- Begin with material students are familiar with or feel comfortable with. This might be a question that can be answered with information from general experience or basic knowledge in the subject area.
- Once students are warmed up, ask questions requiring students to explain relationships among the general concepts and ideas.
- Let the discussion peak by asking questions that require students to apply concepts and principles they have developed to new data and different situations.

Types of Effective Questions

Here are some types of questions that tend to facilitate thoughtful, sustained discussions:

1-Analysis Questions beginning with "Why..." "How would you explain..." "What is the importance of..." "What is the meaning of"

2-Compare and Contrast "Compare..." "Contrast..." "What is the difference between..." "What is the similarity between..."

3-Cause and Effect "What are the causes/results of..." "What connection is there between..."

4-Clarification, "What is meant by..." "Explain how..."

The Theological and Biblical Meaning of Exile

As Christians, we live “*as foreigners and exiles*” (1 Peter 2:11). Indeed, we live as if we were already in the world to come. This was the testimony of the heroes of faith.

“... admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13-16)

The Bible story is a story of exile. The dictionary provides two definitions for Exile:

- 1-The state or a period of forced absence from one's country or home.
- 2-The state or a period of voluntary absence from one's country or home.

With these two definitions for exile, we can see that the Bible is a story of Exile from beginning to end.

- Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden.
- Abraham left his country and his father’s house to go to the place God would show him.
- Jacob ran from his home to a place he had never been for fear his brother would kill him.
- Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and carried off to Egypt.
- Moses escaped his home in the palace of Pharaoh and set off for the desert of Sinai.
- David ran from Saul and lived among the Philistines.
- John the Baptist volunteered to leave the comfort of his home and live in the desert.
- Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tested by the devil.
- In the book of Acts, Christians fled the persecution of the Temple leaders.
- Paul was converted and left everything to live for three years in the desert.
- Peter left his home to follow Jesus; he left Jerusalem to be an alien in Rome.
- The Jerusalem Christians became exiles as they fled from Jerusalem when the Romans destroyed the city (70AD).
- The New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21:1-5) is the ultimate end of exile and the final restoration of God’s creation.

From the moment our parents, Adam and Eve traded trusting the Creator for a creature (the snake), the world has been in exile,

“the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22-23).

Maltbie Babcock’s lyric, “This is my Father’s World” (1901) captures the biblical vision of the final victory.

This is my Father’s world:
Oh, let me ne’er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father’s world,
The battle is not done:
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heav’n be one.

PART 1
The Purpose of Exile:
Transformation of the Heart

Dr. Parrott’s Notes From <https://thebibleproject.com/blog/exile-predicted/>

For followers of Jesus, the story of his life, death, and resurrection, is the absolute center of our practice, belief, and worldview. It’s the central event, which generated the entire Christian story and the New Testament.

However, these events didn’t occur in a vacuum. Jesus saw himself fulfilling a larger storyline that was told in his Bible, the Hebrew Bible, or as most Christians refer to it, the Old Testament. One of the most important events in Jesus’ Bible, which also changed Jewish history forever, is the Babylonian exile.

Moses describes the Babylonian exile in his final speech in the book of Deuteronomy, “*Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand*” (28:34). If the fulfillment of God’s promises depended solely on human ability, then hopelessness would be an appropriate response. But, it doesn’t! God has been the faithful one in this story, and it’s his covenant promises that are carrying the day. God is committed to having a covenant people who will love him, love each other, and who will become the vehicle of his divine blessing for all nations.

However, the story of exile shows us that this will never happen unless God accomplishes a deep level of transformation in the human heart. The laws were given to Israel to point out the way for them to love God and others, but paradoxically they only pointed out how broken and selfish the Israelites actually are. Now, we discover that the consequences of breaking these covenant laws will

bring disaster upon Israel. In a twist however, amidst this darkness of the human condition, Moses discovers a glimmer of hope:

Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you can love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. -Deuteronomy 30:4-6

The conclusion of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) is Moses' somber speech and his prediction is grave. However, the whole point of this story is that humans cannot achieve the new creation on their own. We are in desperate need of help in the deepest way, which is precisely what Jesus came to offer when he did for us what we could never do for ourselves. The Ten Commandments, all the laws of the Torah, Israel's failure and rebellion, it all points to the future new covenant of God transforming the hearts of his people. This is the only way that our old humanity and this broken creation will be ushered into a new future.

The exile left its mark on Israelite history in an unparalleled manner and played a key role in the formation of the Bible itself. For the Israelites, the exile was the watershed moment of their history on which the entire Bible gains its significance; everything else orbits around the gravity of this faith-shaking moment.

The entire national structure of the kingdom, which they believed to be ordained by God himself, came crashing down. This event fulfilled centuries of prophetic warnings, as hundreds of years of tradition, culture, and history was destroyed in just one year. This was their Day of the Lord, and it left them absolutely devastating.

Read the book of Lamentations if you want some somber reflection on what it felt like to live through the tragedy of Jerusalem's destruction and the people's enslavement under Babylonian rule. You can understand how it may be hard to find hope in such a situation.

Israel is going to fail, just like the rest of humanity. But, after their failure, God transforms their hearts so that they can become what God has called them to be. The Old Testament prophets succeeding the exile picked up these promises and developed them. The New Testament apostles believed that this new reality of the transformed heart was taking place through Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

- The Prophet Ezekiel: *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."* -Ezekiel 36:26

- The Prophet Jeremiah: *"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."* -Jeremiah 24:7
- The Apostle Paul: *"No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people."* -Romans 2:29

The prophets and apostles present Israel's Messiah as the one who truly obeyed the law and loved God and neighbor. Jesus was the kind of human, and the kind of Israelite, that God made us to be, but that we perpetually fail to be. He did this on our behalf, so that faithless people might receive life and blessing instead of death. This is ultimately what Moses was hoping for, a day when God transforms the hearts of his people so that they can love God and others.

After spending decades in a foreign land under foreign rule, the Israelites are allowed to return home under Persian rule. However, this offers only a false climax. The people's hearts and spiritual state is as broken as it was before they left. Hope for future is all they had, but we know how that story ends! JESUS!

I suggest you view this short video:
<https://thebibleproject.com/videos/exile/>

PART 2 Spiritual Dynamics and Scriptural Resources For God's People in Exile

(Dr. Parrott's Notes from Walter Brueggemann (1997) *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.)

Let's consider the metaphor of "exile" for the situation of the church (in the United States). It is not the kind of exile, which puts you in a different country, nor the kind of exile that puts you in a political battle with the philosophies of various institutions. The concern here is pastoral. To be "exiled" is to experience the loss of the structured, reliable world that has always given meaning and coherence. It is to find yourself in a context where your most treasured and trusted symbols of faith are mocked, trivialized, or dismissed.

These two issues: 1) loss of structure and 2) loss of symbols are hard at work in our world. From an evangelical dimension, Christians find themselves increasingly at odds with the dominant values of the nation. On the other hand, it is also cultural in that the old white, male-dominated culture is quickly being replaced.

What does the Bible have to say to exiles? One might suspect that when the Jews were in exile, they could have: 1) abandoned their faith, or 2) settled in despair, or 3) retreated to a very private kind of religion. However, just the opposite took place. It was in the exile that the most wonderful writings and daring theology appear in the Old Testament. They discover news about God rather than despair in the facts of their situation.

Here are six dynamics of exile and six scriptural resources:

1. Exiles must grieve their loss by expressing their anger and sadness. We must help people be honest about the loss of the great days of the past, the loss of the way the church "used to be." It is **a commitment to honest sadness**. Each year the Jews celebrate and grieve the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. We live in a culture of denial, but exiles must be honest about what they are feeling and what they have experienced.

One great source of scriptural help is the book of Lamentations.

A) It is a book that begins with sustained and terrible negativity (no resting place, 1:3; no pasture, 1:6; no one to help, 1:7; none to comfort, 1:9-16, 17, 21; 2:13; no rest, 2:18).

B) It ends with deep pathos...forgotten and abandoned.

C) In 3:18-23, there is an amazing struggle and negotiation between sadness and hope. Somewhere in the midst of all the sorrow, hope comes to the surface.

The other emotion expressed by exiles is resentment (anger or rage). Psalm 137 deals with this issue. With utter confidence on God's sovereign Presence and love, the anger is poured out at the "embarrassing" end of the psalm.

2. Exiles also feel forgotten and forsaken, like "a motherless child." To be an exile is like being orphaned. You have no family place, family food, family friends. The theme is **rootlessness**.

The Scripture records (and records made during the time of the exile) the genealogies. To us, they often seem boring. But, if it is "your" genealogy, it brings back old memories, old customs, old photographs, old habits, and old ways. In other words, genealogies are shorthand for remembering "our story." The genealogy in Matthew lists the 'scandalous mothers' and the recital of Hebrews 11 reminds us that the story is all by faith.

Genealogies also conquer the sense of isolation and remind us that we do have "mothers" and fathers...the communion of the saints...Our names are written in "the book of life."

3. Another reality (and the greatest threat to exiles) is **the power of despair**. Two things are at work: On the one hand, the whole world that we have worked for is irretrievably lost and, on the other hand, we are helpless to do anything about it.

For people of faith, this brings to the surface two almost overwhelming challenges: First, we begin to doubt God's faithfulness (Lamentations 5:20; Isaiah 49:14) and, second, we begin to doubt God's power (so that God has to remind us, Isaiah 50:2, 59: 1).

A great passage of Scripture to combat despair is Isaiah 40-55. The original and overriding intent of the passage is to transform the reality of despair in the lives of exiles. Look at these four pictures:

A. It is here we find the word "gospel" as a theological term (Isaiah 40:9, 52:7). And, between these two texts, God triumphs over Babylonian gods (46:1-4) and Babylonian royalty (47:1-11).

B. It is faith that goes back to creation...before we were even on the scene or gave our hearts and hands to any enterprise or dream (Isaiah 40:12-17, 42:5, 44:24). It not only reminds us that the creative power of God is before our existence, it reminds us that His creative power is for the entire world, forcing us to think big and pray big.

C. Speeches of judgment show God taking on the Babylonian gods, destroying their claims, and establishing true faith (Isaiah 41:21-29, 44:6-7, 45:21-21). Hearing such speeches (particularly when you are the one being oppressed) gives courage, strength, backbone, and "chutzpah."

D. Also, there are words that speak of the tenderness and compassion of God's care (Isaiah 41:13-16, 43:1-5). These salvation songs use creation language to speak of how God creates His treasured people.

It is despair that can rob the church (and any person) from the energy and generous spirit it takes to carry out the mission and ministry of Christ. It is the combination of defiance and tenderness, the good news and a global vision, that fights against the pathology of despair.

4. Exile is also an experience of *profaned absence*. When we are in exile, we feel that God is gone and the glory has departed. For ancient Israel, the Temple had been destroyed and God had left Jerusalem (Ezekiel 9-10). There is no place for God and the wonderful vessels (For us: our words, our ways, our understanding) are treated like hock-able items at a pawn shop. We feel like nothing is sacred any more. The response to this kind of feeling is to become increasingly selfish and brutal (You have to look out for yourself -- They ought to get what's coming to them...I am afraid that much right-wing religion trades on this sense of loss.)

For such a crisis, we want to look to the priestly texts of the Pentateuch. These texts are a major pastoral response to a sense of God's absence. For the exiles, the picture of God's presence is remembering the sacramental life. Look to what is sacred when you are surrounded by everything profane in Babylon.

A. We see the importance of circumcision (Genesis 17). In the exile, this becomes a powerful metaphor of faith (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4).

B. The Sabbath becomes the primary act of faith in exile. Whatever the rest of the world does, we will take our time to be with God. Babylon wants to produce more and more, but we shall take time to rest and give life back to God as a trusted gift, not a frantic achievement.

C. The tabernacle becomes a picture and a reminder of a special place where God's holiness can be properly hosted (Exodus 25-31, 35-40; Ezekiel 40-48).

When God seems so far away, there is a proper sense in which we need symbols, visual aids, and more than just verbal reminders. We need to "do something" as we remember that God is here.

In the early days of Christianity, the feeling of exile was also present. Hebrews 7-10 uses the wonderful pictures of the tabernacle to remind, inspire, and imagine the Presence of God in a very real sense.

5. Exile is also an experience of **moral incongruity**. There are feelings that God has failed...and there are feelings that we have failed. There is groping for an understanding of how such a horrible thing can happen. It certainly goes beyond explanations of simple punishment. It certainly goes beyond explanations of the failure of heaven. It certainly cannot be summed up in "the way the world turns."

There are those who are tempted to interpret all exile as direct and adequate punishment. This will keep the world morally coherent and reliable -- but at enormous cost. We protect God from being blamed, but we take the blame to neurotic ends. There is something else besides "fault" that is loose and at work when the world is destabilized.

One of the great pieces of writing to come out of the exile is the book of Job. The issue that surfaces in the book of Job is that there is something more at work than fault. It is a very honest book that dares to raise the question of God's failure. Job indicts God (Job 9:13-24) and is very confident in himself (Job 29-31) which prepares the way for the whirlwind which simply blows away all the moral issues of fault and blame (Job 38:1-42:6). And, as the wind blows away the questions of failure, fault, blame, and guilt...what appears is a larger vista of mystery, wild and threatening dimensions of faith, a dangerous trust and affirmation of God when we cannot see our way through. It is a world of crocodiles (Job 41:1-34) and hippopotamuses (Job 40:15-24) with cunning evil, deep unanswered questions, and a glorious doxology...Life goes on (Job 42:7-17).

6. The final danger in exile is to become preoccupied with self. **Self-preoccupation** means that you cannot get outside of yourself in order to rethink, re-imagine, or re-describe the larger reality from God's point of view. How can you get beyond yourself when you are surrounded by an experience that leaves you with nothing but yourself; all else has been taken away? In other words, how can you defy the stark reality of Babylon?

There are wonderful tales that come out of the exile period. Some of them are very old but have new meaning when read by exiles.

- A. The story of Joseph is a story of cooperating with the established order but having the ability to "look out for his own people" at the same time.
- B. The story of Esther is one of courage in the face of established power in which she gains honor for herself and well-being for her people.
- C. The story of Daniel is of someone pressed into the civil service of the Empire but maintains a sense of self, rooted quite outside the Empire.

When you are in the struggle between Christ and culture, there are no easy answers. It is often a process of negotiation...Should I be like Joseph, like Esther, or like Daniel?

PART 3 **Spiritual Disciplines for Exiles:** **Preparing to Hear From Heaven**

(Dr. Parrott's Notes from Walter Brueggemann (1997) *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.)

Consider Israel's journey in three stages:

- 1) **God's Promise.** The beginning of the story is Genesis and Exodus; a people deeply at risk, without home, land, security, moving in trust to a new place. They experience the sovereign promise of God.
- 2) **God's Demand.** As the story continues, the promise of God is kept. The land is reached and acquired. There is sweeping narrative concerning the land, God's faithfulness, and Israel's wonder at this place of "*milk and honey*" (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). But, the land transforms Israel, seducing her into wanting more and more land, security, goods, cities, armies, and taxes. They forgot that the good life and the good land are gifts. Greed overcomes gratitude. In their self-sufficiency, Israel encounters the sovereign demand of God. It comes on the lips of the prophets. They have mismanaged power, land, security, and God's promises. They have failed God.

- 3) **God's Absence.** Israel leaves the land disconsolate (Jeremiah 31:15). It is a story of loss, displacement, and exile. It is the result of failed leadership and the expansionist policies of Babylon; however, the shrill, hard, uncompromising words of the prophets continue to echo. This is a theological experience. Israel came to meet the sovereign absence of God (1 Samuel 5:21-22; Ezekiel 9:3, 10:4-5; Lamentations 1:2-21).

The long story can be expressed in three phrases: Sovereign Promise, Sovereign Demand, and Sovereign Absence. Now, in exile, it has become once again a place of beginning: Barrenness, powerless, without hope. They are as barren as Sarah and as oppressed as Moses. There may be more to come. There is a fresh summons to faith. There is a daring adventure in theological creativity. At this moment, however, there is only waiting and grieving and wondering. It is a journey of risk, trust, and obedience.

The theme of exile is the place of new beginning. It is important to notice two things: 1) Exile is a paradigm and model, not an extensive and complete historical fact for the Jews. Not everyone was deported. However, all Jews, then and subsequently, participated in the sense of being exiles. 2) The situation of exile created an enormous theological crisis in Israel and evoked astonishing theological creativity.

"With the use of metaphor of 'exile,' I affirm that we find ourselves in a cultural context in which our central faith claims are increasingly unwelcome and are received, if not with hostility, at least with indifference. We find ourselves alienated from the dominant value system. That is why that I have insisted that exile is not primarily a geographical phenomenon but a liturgical, cultural, spiritual condition; one may indeed be an exile while being geographically at home" (Walter Bruggemann).

Living in exile is traveling incognito. Our faith claims are more and more at odds with the dominant values of the culture. The situation is new for us. There are three lines of response that are possible:

1. It is possible to respond in assimilation.
2. It is possible to respond in despair.
3. It is possible to respond with fresh, imaginative theological work.

In doing this creative work, we must remember:

1. The new, imaginative activity now required does not scuttle the tradition but stays very close to it.
2. The new imaginative enterprise stays very, very close to the present reality of suffering and displacement.

The response of exile upon which I will focus by way of suggesting a model is the poetry of Isaiah 40-55. It is deeply grounded in tradition, enormously imaginative in articulation, and a hard, disciplined intellectual act of faith. Also, the core reality of this poetry as response to exile is its focal evangelical conviction. It is a gospel of the nearness of God's rule. Indeed, it is God's sovereign promise, leading to God's sovereign demand, and because of our failure, God's sovereign absence...We now hear the voice of God's sovereign newness.

This Gospel does not teach us that we need to despair, nor do we have to be seduced by the empire. We can "*fear not*" (Isaiah 40:9, 52:7).

Disciplines For Exiles – Preparing to Hear from God

We cannot coerce a new word from God. We cannot simply put the word in His mouth. But we can be ready when He is prepared to speak. Indeed, we cannot silence a word if it were uttered. However, our preparing ourselves provides open ears and a ready heart. Let me suggest six disciplines of readiness:

1. Dangerous Memories. In exile, you are tempted to forget all things, or remember only the pain that is closest to you. But, Isaiah remembers Abraham and Sarah (Isaiah 51:1-2). The book teaches us that if you seek God, seek Him at the oldest (if not the most embarrassing) circumstance we have. Remember Abraham. Remember Sarah (Isaiah 54:4-8).

We need our old memories, our deepest roots, and our most embarrassing memories. It is there that we see faith, the Presence of God, and the power to press on; not by orthodoxy or morality, but by the more haunting requirement of trust.

2. Dangerous Criticisms. Isaiah makes a religious critique of the Babylonian Empire. The book mocks their gods (Isaiah 46:1-7). The book then goes on to make a political critique (Isaiah 47:1-14).

The two critiques (religious and political) are not given to the Babylonians. Even if they had ever heard of them, I doubt that they would have noticed nor heeded such words. Rather, the poetry is for the benefit of Israel's "overhearing." It provides and opportunity to be "born again" in exile. It is to be born into a new identity that is outside the Empire.

3. Dangerous Promises. Think of our barren mother (Sarah) being promised new life (Isaiah 54:1-3). The married one is Babylon; superior, secure, self-satisfied. The barren one is the community in exile. The promise acknowledges hopelessness, abandonment, and despair. Yet, it dares to promise new life. It dares to invite us to sing, dance, and hope in God.

4. Dangerous New Songs. New songs are to be sung. Music is serious and music is dangerous (Isaiah 42:10-16). If you listen to the new song, you discover that it is

made of the old words. But, the old words are recovered and reclaimed. It is quoting the old formula, and yet it is a new song. It is a new song made up of the old story. Remember: The Civil Rights Movement was born on the singing lips of the suffering. In South Africa (1994), Christmas carols were banned because they evoked revolutionary energy and danger. There is a lot to be said for the threat of daring singing.

5. Dangerous Bread (Isaiah 55:1-3). Food has the power to transform our loyalty, energy, work, and care. The one who provides the food governs our loyalties. In Exodus 16, the Israelites remember living long on the flesh-pots of Egypt. In Daniel 1, the empire is in control of bread and thus freedom. In Isaiah 55, there is a profound invitation: Come, buy, eat without money, without price. Free food, free lunch. Exiles will not give up the bread of the empire unless there is an alternate bread. This is a dangerous bread. It is the bread of the Gospel. (Perhaps we need to consider our eating disorders of the theological kind.)

6. Dangerous Departure. Worship is the first place for danger, but eventually the exiles have to move outside the liturgy and into public life (Isaiah 52:11-12). The departure is a repeat of the book of Exodus, but it is also unique. The first time, our mothers and fathers hurried in a panic. This time, there is no hurry, no haste, no fear or panic. We go like first-class passengers. *"God will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard"* (Isaiah 55:12). The departure is seen as geographic, but first it has to be found in the liturgy, the imagination, the anticipation of the community acting out this daring departure from the support, stability, and reassurance of the empire.

Such dangerous disciplines make us ready to act in hope when the time is right for the birth of new faith, new mission, and new worship. We can do this because we belong to God and are intensely cared for:

*But now, this is what the Lord says --
He who created you, O Jacob,
He who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are Mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they shall not overwhelm you."
Isaiah 43:1-2*