

Prepares
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Allen Power

Jeremiah 1:4-19

Opening: Are you a planner, or a more “seat of the pants” do it “on the fly” kind of person? If you’re not a planner I hope you are married to one or have one in your inner circle! When it comes to my job or preparing for Sunday morning, I am intense about preparation and planning. I subscribe to the “5 P’s: Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance.” When it comes to family vacations I leave it to Susan and our son-in-law, David and just show up, enjoy, and pay.

If you want to be good at golf you go to a coach. If you want to learn to play piano you go to a teacher. If you want your daughter to have a “fairytale” wedding you hire a wedding planner. If you want to get fit you go to a personal trainer. Those “pros” guide you in what to do and how to do it, but YOU still have to do the work.

The great thing about fulfilling God’s plan for your life is He not only gives the assignment, He also provides everything we need to fulfill that assignment as long as we seek and surrender to His plan. (2 Peter 1:3)

Studying Jeremiah chapter one benefits us in two ways. First, it gives us an introduction and context for one of the great, Major Prophets in scripture and how God called Him into service. Secondly, we see an application to our own lives [3 year old Knox: “*God has a plan for ME!*”]

The point: God has a purpose for every follower of Christ. Each one has a role to play in His divine plan. Some parts of our purpose are common to all His followers, (knowing Him, loving Him, living in obedience to His word, making disciples.) Beyond those, God has a unique purpose and plan customized for each individual before we were even conceived. The question is whether we will seek to know and fulfill that plan depending on Him for the power to do it?

Who was Jeremiah? Known as the “weeping prophet,” he is credited with writing this book and the book of Lamentations. He grew up in a family of priests but God called him to be a prophet. It was a tough assignment. “*Jeremiah exercised his ministry during the darkest, most difficult, and most dangerous period in the history of Judah...the decline and fall of the Southern Kingdom.*”ⁱ “*Jeremiah served God faithfully for 40 years. During that time the people ignored, rejected, and persecuted him. Jeremiah’s preaching was unsuccessful by human standards, yet he did not fail in his task. He remained faithful to God.*”ⁱⁱ Beginning in verse four we read about Jeremiah’s call to ministry.

4 The word of the Lord came to me, saying, **5** “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

- Jeremiah testified, “...*the word of the Lord came to me.*” Young Jeremiah didn’t go looking for this calling; it was all God’s plan. When we feel a calling to ministry we must make sure it’s a “long distance” call (from God.)
- God’s plan for Jeremiah was created before Jeremiah was created.
- Ponder that thought: Before God formed us in our mother’s womb He knew each of us and had a plan and purpose in mind that is unique to us.
- Before birth, Jeremiah was “consecrated” or “set apart.” He was not only set apart for this assignment but also set apart to serve God in holiness.
- God was very specific about Jeremiah’s unique calling:
 - He was “appointed” (called) by God for a specific role as a prophet.
 - “Prophet” literally means “called one” or “called to speak.”
 - “To the nations” – He was called to a specific mission field.
- Jeremiah’s reaction was not uncommon for those whom God calls:

6 “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

- We don’t know for sure but Jeremiah was likely twenty years old or less.
- His reaction doesn’t feel like rebellion but rather fear of inadequacy. It reminds us of Moses in Exodus 3: “*Why me, God? I’m not up to this!*”
- Was that very human reaction necessarily a bad thing? Why is some “fear and trembling” about being up to the task of ministry a good thing?
- Alistair Begg says the call to vocational ministry is so significant, his advice is, “*if you can stay out of the ministry, stay out of the ministry.*”ⁱⁱⁱ
- Jeremiah was a reluctant candidate for prophet. Perhaps he was always a bit reluctant, but later in his ministry he said, “...*if I say I’ll never mention the Lord or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It’s like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can’t do it!*” (Jer. 20:9) Jeremiah was compelled to fulfill God’s plan for him.
- Jeremiah’s healthy fear of inadequacy was met with God’s promises:

7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. **8** Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

- God didn’t say, “*This will be a breeze; a piece of cake; loads of fun!*”
- You don’t get “rescued” from an easy task; this would be tough.
- God promised His presence and protection.

9 Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth.

- The old saying is, “*God doesn’t call the equipped, He equips the called.*”

- That “touch” from God not only gave Jeremiah the “words” but the power to deliver His message. Ross McLaren writes, *“The touch of God transforms mediocrity into excellence.”*^{iv} Isn’t that encouraging?
- Jeremiah would desperately need God’s power for this two-fold ministry.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

- Preachers and prophets are called to deliver the bad news (judgment for sin) so they can then deliver the good news (God’s grace and mercy.)
- Jeremiah’s calling came as God’s patience with Judah ran out. There would be no warm and fuzzy messages from Jeremiah. It’s no wonder he was always weeping! We should pray for preachers in our day because they must deliver both the bad and good news in a very dark world!
- God used symbolic examples to show Jeremiah what lay ahead:

11 The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied. **12** The Lord said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.”

- Just as God makes every tree bloom in spring, He will fulfill His word.

13 The word of the Lord came to me again: “What do you see?” “I see a pot that is boiling,” I answered. “It is tilting toward us from the north.” **14** The Lord said to me, “From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. **15** I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,” declares the Lord. “Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah. **16** I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made.

- God’s instrument of judgment for Judah’s sin would be the Babylonians. Judah’s refusal to repent and turn from their sin would result in seventy years of foreign captivity. It was Jeremiah’s job to warn them but they would not listen. How would Jeremiah be able to minister in this environment?

17 “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. **18** Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. **19** They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

- God said to Jeremiah: *“Stand and deliver my message and I’ll protect you.”* I’m reminded of two of my favorite verses:
 - **Joshua 1:9 (ESV) — 9** Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”
 - **Isaiah 41:10 (ESV) — 10** fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
- Sometimes we look at a very blessed person and say, *“It’s good to be so and so.”* Perhaps our reaction to this record of Jeremiah’s calling might be: *“It’s good NOT to be Jeremiah!”*
- On commentator summarized Jeremiah’s ministry: *“For forty years, Jeremiah exhorted, warned, begged, implored, and pleaded with his fellow countrymen to turn from their spiritual harlotry. When they refused, he called for peaceful surrender to Babylon, the nation God had chosen as his agent of discipline. His counsel was rejected, and as a result Judah paid a great price— seventy years of exile in a foreign land.”^{iv}*
- On the surface, it appears Jeremiah was a colossal failure. Not so. By God’s standard, this reluctant, weeping prophet’s success was that he courageously trusted God and fulfilled his difficult calling. He traded his fears and feelings of inadequacy for God’s power and protection.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- What does this passage mean for you and me? How is this more than a biblical history lesson? I’m glad you asked!
- Jeremiah’s calling was specific to him (thank God!) but God’s method applies to every follower of Christ:
- **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) —** tells us, *“...we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*
- Before we were even conceived, God knew us and created a purpose and plan for our individual lives. How do you feel when you consider that?
- Every Christ-follower has been called to love God, love others, live in obedience to His word and make disciples by sharing our faith but beyond that, God has a specific plan tailored just for YOU.
- It’s a natural reaction to have some fear and trembling that we are not equipped for the task. How can those fears actually HELP us as we discern and carry out God’s unique plan and calling for me?
- How can we know His plan and purpose for us? That’s a big topic for a Sunday morning summary. Some of you are likely already sensing you are in the “sweet spot” of God’s unique plan for you.
- What are some ACTION STEPS we might take to learn His unique plans for us? How can we avoid trying to get God to bless OUR plan instead of seeking His plan? How should gifting and passion factor in?
- If you are seeking a fresh view of God’s plan and purpose for you, I would end with this recommendation: Focus on living out Romans 12:1&2.

- Present yourself to God as “a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. Do this as an act of “worship” to Him.
- “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.
- Those verses tell us when we do those things we “*will learn to know God’s will...which is good and pleasing and perfect.*”^{vi}
- This week let’s ask God to guide us toward His unique plan and purpose for us and let’s commit to carry out those things He has called every Christ-follower to do.

ⁱ Green, L. J. (1972). [Jeremiah](#). In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The teacher’s Bible commentary* (p. 430). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 49808-49809). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/chosen-called-and-faithful/>

^{iv} McLaren, Ross. Holman Old Testament Commentary - Jeremiah, Lamentations: Volume 16 (p. 16). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^v *ibid* (pp. 21-22).

^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ro 12:1–2). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.