



10

SESSION TEN

The Calling of Jeremiah

SESSION SUMMARY

Even before he was born, Jeremiah was called to be God's prophet. Because his prophetic message was contrary to what the people wanted to hear, Jeremiah faced opposition and persecution. Nevertheless, Jeremiah remained faithful to God's call despite the obstacles. In Jeremiah's grief, we see a picture of the tender heart of God, most fully expressed in Jesus' weeping for the unrepentant people of Jerusalem. From Jeremiah, we also learn that the God who calls us to deliver His message is the God who will empower us for His mission.

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 1:4-10

THE POINT

God equips those He has chosen to minister in His name.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Imagine that a few of your close friends are having a birthday party, and the only thing they want is a certain kind of cake. Because you love those people, you want to give them this gift. The problem is that you don't know a spatula from a measuring spoon. You've never melted butter, measured flour, or melted chocolate for icing. In fact, the only thing you have as an asset to your cause is a picture of a perfectly formed and created birthday cake. You have to move from *Step 0* to the final product all on your own.

Or imagine having never played baseball and being told that you have to step onto the field that day as the starting shortstop. Or being scheduled to give a concert before a crowd, playing a classical piano piece without ever having learned how to play the piano.

To do these tasks and a host of others, we not only need to see what the task is, we also need to be properly prepared in order to perform it. We need the necessary training, the right materials, and the right equipment in order to do what we have been called upon to do.

Some of us feel the same sort of intimidation when considering what it means to follow God's will for our lives. We have been called to be salt and light, to love the world without being corrupted by the world, to be couriers of the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever our feet fall. It's the greatest task in the universe, and because of this, we might feel unequipped for such a mighty cause.

Jeremiah felt that way, too. But God's prophet learned, as we will, that God does not leave His people unequipped. Instead, God equips them to minister in His name.

- **When have you felt unequipped to do something you had been asked to do? How did you respond?**

Option 2

Being "chosen" sometimes carries a negative connotation. Think of children choosing people to be on their teams at recess. Those who are chosen first likely feel like they know their place and their purpose. What about those who are chosen last? Thankfully, we do not have to worry about this with God. All believers are chosen by God to be a part of His purpose, each using their God-given skills and talents for His glory.

- **How does knowing that God has a purpose for your life encourage you as a believer?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God equips those He has chosen to minister in His name.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Jeremiah** - prophet who constantly proclaimed God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, and yet he was also a prophet of hope

PLOT

The next prophet on our list is Jeremiah. He was called to be God's prophet, even before He was born. Because his prophetic message was contrary to what the people wanted to hear, Jeremiah faced opposition and persecution. Nevertheless, Jeremiah remained faithful to God's call despite the obstacles. From Jeremiah, we learn that the God who calls us to deliver His message is the God who will empower us for His mission.

TIMELINE

JEREMIAH

God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.

THE NEW COVENANT

God promises to indwell His people.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.

GOD'S PLAN FOR JEREMIAH PRECEDED HIS BIRTH

Prior to Jeremiah's birth, Judah found itself wedged between two world superpowers. The tiny kingdom was set between Egypt and Assyria, and for the last hundred years or so Assyria had brought the entire region into their empire. Any attempt at rebellion had been squelched. The northern nation of Israel had tried to rebel, but was overrun and the people were deported. Israel's existence as a kingdom was ended by the bully on the block.

In Judah, King Josiah had come to power at the age of eight. When he was twenty years old, Josiah began a sweeping reform of the nation, calling all of his people to return to the Lord and destroy their idols. It was during this period of spiritual awakening that Jeremiah was called to prophesy and preach.

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:4-5)

These two short verses provide powerful insight into the character and power of God. Sometimes, even as Christians, we tend to think of ourselves as victims of circumstance. But if we really believe what the Bible says about God, then we must accept that God actively forms and calls us to fulfill His will. Let's break this down.

First, God actively forms us. God reminded Jeremiah that he was intentionally designed for this purpose—set apart to be God's prophet. And God's intentional formation was not specific to Jeremiah, although He specifically intended Jeremiah to be a prophet in that particular time and place. He is still actively involved in the formation of every man, woman, and child.

Second, God actively calls. God formed Jeremiah in the womb. That means He intentionally gave Jeremiah the physical and emotional capacity he would need for his prophetic mission. God doesn't form us in the womb, and then leave us to live our lives as we see fit. He also actively calls us, just as He called Jeremiah.

Long before Jeremiah could walk, talk, or fully and completely formulate his thoughts, God set him apart as a prophet to the nations. Before giving Jeremiah this task, God reminded him that his days were planned from the beginning. God constructed Jeremiah for a purpose, and sent him on a mission planned well before Jeremiah's time.

- **God actively formed you and called you to a specific purpose to fulfill His plan for the world. What does this reveal to you about God's character? Your purpose in life?** (p. 66, PSG)

GOD PROMISED TO BE WITH JEREMIAH

Despite the truth of God's formation and God's call, Jeremiah was still hesitant to take on his mission. He wasn't the first reluctant messenger of the Lord, and he certainly wouldn't be the last. However, as is always the case, Jeremiah's focus was on the wrong thing when he protested.

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." (Jer. 1:6-8)

Do you see where Jeremiah's focus was? In that single verse, he used the pronoun *I* three different times. Jeremiah was focused on himself—his own shortcomings, limited abilities, and inexperience. It's not unlike Moses, who also protested to God's mission, claiming that he could not speak clearly and the Israelites wouldn't listen to him.

God's response to Moses, and here to Jeremiah, is not so much a counter to the objections. God never denied that Jeremiah didn't know how to speak, and He did not encourage Jeremiah by saying, "You're more mature than you think you are." Instead, God refocused Jeremiah's gaze to where it should be in the first place: on God.

Jeremiah was making false assumptions—God's call wasn't about his readiness or capabilities. Instead, it was about whether God was ready and capable. And the Lord was.

Similarly, God's call is not a matter of who we are or our abilities; it's a matter of the Lord's presence. God's abiding presence helps us overcome obstacles to our mission.

We should stop here for some clarity though. Just because God will be with us as He was with Jeremiah, doesn't mean that we will be "successful" in our mission. Then again, that depends on how we define success.

In Jeremiah's case, he went on a preaching tour across the land to further the reforms of Josiah. He was met with opposition and was branded as a traitor by his own people. The new covenant Josiah had made with God on behalf of the people was broken almost as soon as it was instituted.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Things got even worse for Jeremiah. After Josiah was killed in a battle with Egypt, Jeremiah continued to preach the need for repentance and predicted the coming fall of the nation and exile of the people. He even appeared before the people wearing an ox yoke. His message was rejected time and time again, but the prophet persisted. In fact, his message was so emotional to him personally that he often wept as he delivered it, causing him to be remembered throughout history as “the weeping prophet.”

On the surface level, this is not the kind of mission we would deem to be successful by any stretch. However, success in the eyes of God is measured less by results and more by faithfulness. When we are faithful to say what God has called us to say to whom God has called us to say it, then the mission is successful. We have been faithful to the Lord.

- **How do you typically think of success? How does your view differ from God's view of success?** (p. 67, PSG)
- **What are some steps you can take to better align your definition of success with what it means to be successful in God's eyes?** (p. 67, PSG)

GOD EQUIPPED JEREMIAH WITH A MESSAGE

Jeremiah was intentionally formed and commissioned. He was sent out, and the presence of God went with Him. And then God gave him a message.

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (Jer. 1:9-10)

What an amazing thing to be able to say, “Thus says the Lord.” Jeremiah was given the very word of God to speak throughout the land, and that word came with power. Jeremiah's message would not be empty rhetoric, but instead would be powerful because of the One who gave it. No matter what else might come in his life in the future, the weeping prophet would know that he was speaking and could stand on the very word of God.

Jeremiah was not the only one who had such an experience. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of God's prophets being given specific messages from the Lord for the people; they were His mouthpiece to uproot and tear down, destroy and demolish, build and plant. Just like Jeremiah, these messengers of God were equipped not to speak their own opinions, but to authoritatively deliver the word of God to their culture.

TIMELINE

EZEKIEL'S VISION

God is capable of raising the dead.

Beginning Winter 2016-17

FAITHFUL IN EXILE

When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.

TESTED BY FIRE

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.

The Bible is the living, active, and unchanging Word of God. God has not only commanded us to share the gospel to the ends of the earth; He has provided the message for us. Just as Jeremiah had the proclamation of God on his lips, we should be so familiar with the Word of God that it influences our language in regular conversation. But in order for that to happen, we must know the Word, and we must speak the Word.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jeremiah reminds us of another prophet in another time, One who felt even more deeply for the people He was charged to speak to. He, too, wept over the lack of repentance and understanding in His people, longing for them with all His heart to return to God. Jesus Himself showed us the depth of the heart of God as He lamented over the same people God pursued in the days of Jeremiah: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:37-38).

If we want to follow Jesus, then we must be faithful to God’s call, regardless of the perceived results. And we must pray for the heart of God as we compassionately reach to those around us with the message of the gospel.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Evangelism

It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How often do you think about the fact that God has a plan and purpose for your life? How would doing so more often change the way you approach your daily activities?** *Answers will vary.*
- **The fact that Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet” and Jesus’ wept over the state of Jerusalem should tell us something about the way we view those who don’t know God. In what ways does this affect your view of others? How will your thoughts and actions toward them change after this study?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important to have your focus fixed on God instead of yourself as you attempt to live on mission for Him? What happens if our focus is misplaced?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What kinds of obstacles do you see in your way to being a messenger of the gospel? How does God’s abiding presence answer those hesitations?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

These passages together remind us that we all are more than jumble of cells and tissue. If God is involved at that specific level, then there is inherent value in every human life. What's more, we should have the same response when we look at ourselves, those around us, and the unborn. The very essence of human existence, as intricate and specialized as our lives are, is a signpost pointing us to the reality and glory of God.

- **What are some signs that might tell us that we have failed to properly recognize God's activity in all of humanity?** *Answers might include things like racism, prejudice toward others, abortion, and so forth.*
- **How does the way we look at ourselves and others change when we recognize that God has truly formed us?** *When we fully realize this truth, we begin to see and treat people with the inherent value, dignity, and respect they have by virtue of being created in God's image.*



HEART

Never before has the Word of God been so accessible, and yet we are finding more and more that we do not know what it actually says. We must, if we want to follow Jesus, be people of the Word. We must treat it with care, love it, cherish it, and commit it to memory. When we do we will find that the Word of God finds its place in us, and having been established in us, it will naturally come out.

- **What habits in your life are you cultivating in order to grow your love and knowledge of God's Word?** *Answers might include things like Scripture memorization, consistent Bible study, and so forth.*
- **What are some distractions in your life that might hinder you from committing to these habits?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

We start with knowing God's Word, but then we must make the active choice to speak God's Word. Over time, choices like this become easier, but we have to start somewhere. We have to choose to actively speak the Word of God, though it might not be well-received or popular.

God's Word trumps our opinions. It trumps our agenda. It trumps our priorities. When we make the choice to start proclaiming God's Word in the various arenas He has given us to influence.

- **What are some obstacles that keep you from speaking God's truth to others more often?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the story of Jeremiah's calling encourage you to be more bold and confident in your task of speaking the truth to others?** *God offers us His presence, just as He offered it to Jeremiah.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #9, which contains an informational chart of the kings and prophets and the time periods in which they served. This is a great resource to point out the sequence of historical events from these sessions, showing both the kings involved and the prophets that overlapped with their reigns.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject