

Family Bible Series for Feb. 19: Push through the doubts to find God's blessing

February 7, 2006

Posted: 2/7/06

Family Bible Series for Feb. 19

Push through the doubts to find God's blessing

- Jeremiah 20:1-13

By Donald Raney

Westlake Chapel, Graham

"Am I doing what God really wants me to do?" "What if I misunderstood what God was calling me to do?" "There must be a better person and a better way to do this."

It is likely that everyone who has sought to serve God has had these and similar thoughts at some point. No matter how committed to God's service a person might be, doubt is an ever-present enemy. Intimidation by an exaggerated view of the size of the task and feelings of insufficiency may lead us to doubt by shifting our focus from our commitment to our abilities. A strong desire to succeed or a perceived lack of results also may lead to doubt by implanting an inaccurate picture of exactly what we have been

called to do.

Such feelings are not new to those God calls. Even the great prophets of the Old Testament had similar doubts. The prophet Jeremiah wrote about his doubts and feelings concerning his call from God.

Through a series of passages scattered throughout the first 20 chapters of his book known as the “confessions of Jeremiah,” the prophet allows the reader to see how he wrestled with these feelings (Jeremiah 11:18-12:6, 15:10-21, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-13).

We also can see how God helped Jeremiah through these times by realigning his perspective and renewing his focus. As we study these passages, we can gain much insight into how we can best deal with our moments spent dealing with doubt.

Jeremiah 20:1-6

Jeremiah had an unpopular message of divine judgment for his own people, and he was the only one telling it. More than once, he was arrested for delivering God’s message. He served as a prophet 40 years without a single convert. Most of his friends and even some of his own family turned against him (Jeremiah 12:6).

Jeremiah had plenty of reason to entertain serious doubts about his calling. On one occasion, Jeremiah had proclaimed God was about to destroy Jerusalem because of the stubbornness of the people. One of the priests had Jeremiah arrested, beaten and placed in the stocks over night.

Such treatment, however, did not deter Jeremiah. Upon being released the following morning, Jeremiah spoke a message of judgment against the

priest. He said the priest would witness the destruction. He would be forced to watch the slaughter of his friends and the exile of all of Judah.

As a sign of this, Jeremiah says the priest's name is no longer Pashhur but Magor-missabib, which means "terror on every side." The priest himself would be carried into exile in Babylon where he would die.

Jeremiah certainly could have allowed such an experience to rob him of his commitment to his calling. As he sat in the stocks that night, he may have questioned whether it was worth the pain and considered apologizing the next morning. Yet through the doubts, the certainty Jeremiah had in his divine call enabled him to remain committed to fulfilling that call. As we face our own doubts today, Jeremiah's example shows us the first step in dealing with them is to remain faithful to do what God has called us to do.

Jeremiah 20:7-10

While Jeremiah remained faithful to carrying out his calling, he continued to wrestle with doubts. He wondered if he had understood God correctly. He wondered if he could or should continue to preach the same message of judgment. He even wondered if God had deceived or misled him.

In Jeremiah 20:7-10, the prophet takes all of the doubts and questions directly to God. He is clearly angry with God. God is supposed to protect those who serve him. Yet Jeremiah has faithfully obeyed God's instructions and has experienced only pain and disappointment.

Yet when Jeremiah tries to withhold the message to avoid further persecution, God's message torments him from within his heart so that he cannot keep it to himself. Jeremiah understandably feels trapped in a life of

suffering and honestly pours all of his frustrations out at God. Many times people do not want to express real negative emotions and feelings to God. They have real questions and anger toward God concerning God's character or actions, but feel expressing these to God would be inappropriate.

But God knows our thoughts and feelings and wants us to be open and honest about them. Jesus has experienced those same emotions and feelings. He understands and is able to help us deal with them, but only as we admit to having them and tell God about them.

Jeremiah 20:11-13

Often, we are able to release and overcome anger and doubts simply by verbally expressing them. As Jeremiah poured out his heart to God, his initial anger at God was gradually replaced by remembrance of God's work and protection in his life. While Jeremiah's foes had persecuted him, God always had been there to protect his life.

Jeremiah also had lived to see God punish many of those who had opposed Jeremiah and his message. Even as he prays that God would exact vengeance on his enemies, Jeremiah is confessing that God not only can punish, but does in fact punish those who oppose his servants. Although doubts would continue to arise, Jeremiah's experiences had provided him with a sufficient foundation for renewed hope and confidence in the future.

Like Jeremiah, we can push through and overcome our doubts by remembering that the same God who called us will provide all we need to accomplish that for which he called us.

Discussion questions

- Have you ever experienced opposition while fulfilling God's call? How did you handle the situation? What happened?
- How do you feel about expressing anger toward God?
- What doubts about your relationship to God or his calling have you recently (or currently) dealt with? How did you work through them?

