

Family Bible Series for Feb. 5: Serve on purpose—starting right now

January 23, 2006

Posted: 1/23/06

Family Bible Series for Feb. 5

Serve on purpose—starting right now

- Jeremiah 1:4-12

By **Donald Raney**

Westlake Chapel, Graham

Nearly all believers would strongly agree that individual service to God is a vital part of the life of the church. We all accept the fact God most often works in the world through the faithful labors of his human agents.

Yet some believers seem to have an inadequate understanding of true service to God. Some see service to God as a special calling that is reserved for those who are chosen as leaders within the church. Since they have not received such a special call from God, they do not see service as their duty.



[For a printer-friendly version, click on the printer icon at bottom of page.](#)

Others understand service is expected of all believers, but it most often takes the form of a call to a specific ministry at a specific time. Thus, they excuse their lack of service as waiting for the right opportunity.

How often do ministry organizers hear, “If you can’t find anyone to do that, let me know”? But God calls all believers to serve on a continuing basis. A large part of the problem is that, too often, most people view service as a task or chore. Service within the kingdom of God is a privilege. Through our service to God, we are able to participate in the fulfillment of God’s purposes in this world.

As we move ahead in service, we also need not be concerned about our ability to serve—God provides all we need to accomplish what he has called us to do. If we can learn to view it in this light, our service can become a fulfilling experience which we would eagerly begin now.

Jeremiah has a lot to teach us about service to God. Perhaps more than any other Old Testament prophet, we are shown Jeremiah’s humanity. We see his questioning of God and his frustrations. Nearly anyone can identify with, and thus learn from, Jeremiah’s experiences with God.

Jeremiah 1:4-8

Like most Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah did not seek to become a prophet. We are told he was the son of a priest in Anathoth. We are not told how old he was when God first came to him, but we do know his prophetic ministry lasted almost 40 years.

Jeremiah's call came during the reign of King Josiah, who is most known for his widespread reforms designed to re-establish proper worship of God. Prior to the reign of Josiah, Josiah's father, King Manasseh, had reigned 55 years.

Throughout his reign, Manasseh had supported and expanded the worship of pagan gods and idols throughout Judah while closing the temple and forcing God's priests into hiding. Although Josiah sought to get rid of the idolatry and restore the worship of God, the people persisted in their sin. Thus, God called Jeremiah to be a prophetic voice calling the people to avoid the coming judgment through repentance.

When God first addresses Jeremiah, he tells the young man he has a special plan for his life. Indeed, God has had this plan in mind since before Jeremiah was born. God was calling Jeremiah to be a "prophet to the nations." Jeremiah is to be God's voice to all peoples, calling them back into a right relationship with God. Jeremiah will be led to stand before powerful leaders and boldly proclaim the words God gives to him.

Such a call would intimidate almost anyone. Jeremiah responds by pointing out he is merely a child and lacks the ability to do this. God replies to Jeremiah's concern by reaffirming his call.

God was well aware of what Jeremiah could and could not do. It was based on this knowledge that God made his choice to call Jeremiah as his spokesman. Whether Jeremiah realized it or not, he was to carry God's message wherever God sent him. He should not be afraid. Since God had chosen him for this task, God would be with him and deliver him from any

dangers.

Just like Jeremiah, God calls us to serve him now. We are not to wait until we acquire whatever special skills or ability or age level we assume we need. God simply wants those who are willing to act as he directs.

Jeremiah 1:9-12

In order to sooth Jeremiah's fears, God promises to protect him and provide him with what he needs.

God begins by showing Jeremiah he will give him the words to say. Perhaps in a visionary experience, God touches Jeremiah's mouth and tells him God has given him the words and the power to speak those words to the leaders of the great nations and kingdoms of the world. Jeremiah is given the authority to speak words that will build up and tear down those kingdoms.

God then gives Jeremiah a vision of an almond branch and assures him God is actively watching over his words to bring about what he declares. The connection between the vision and this statement may seem odd to many modern readers. The connection is unfortunately lost in translation. In the original Hebrew, the words for "almond" and "watch" are very similar, thus creating a wordplay in the ears of the original audience.

Yet even for modern readers, the meaning and significance is the same. God is promising that not only will he provide Jeremiah with the words to speak, but he also will be at work to fulfill those words. Thus the newly called prophet can proceed with fulfilling his calling without further concern about his own abilities.

The same promise is available to us today. We need not wait for a special

calling or be concerned about our abilities. We simply need to get busy serving God, knowing he knows and will provide all we need.

Discussion questions

- What are some other common excuses for not serving God?
- How do you think God would respond to those excuses?
- What plans are you willing to make to begin serving God now?

