

Explore the Bible: God Prepares

May 22, 2023

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 4 focuses on Jeremiah 1:4-19.*

As a professor, I have the opportunity to interact and engage with young men and women who are at key transitions in their life. Many of them are just coming to grips with the idea of a vocation, some are entering into relationships that will lead to marriage and some are struggling even to know who they are as a person.

As a consequence, one of the issues we deal with quite a bit is the matter of their identity in Christ and the fact that God has been and continues to be preparing them for what awaits them in their future. Additionally, I try to help them see that their personalities and characteristics, as long as they are not sinful, are part of how God created them towards the goal of who he wants them to be. It is gratifying to see these young men and women realize they will not face anything beyond God's knowledge and, with him, they are ready to face life's challenges. This is true for all of us.

The book of Jeremiah begins with the call of Jeremiah. We are not always given the story of a prophet's call, so when we are, it likely means that it is essential to understanding their times and situation. Jeremiah lived in a time still very much under the evil influence of Manasseh, a king described as having "done more evil than the Amorites" (2 King 21:11). It was a time when the people were immersed in sin, but convinced that they were safe because they had the Temple and were the people of God.

How does someone break through such disregard and disinterest for and in the things of God? Having grown up in a priestly house (perhaps, though doubtful, even the house of the high priest), Jeremiah knew from a very early age the uphill battle he was facing. In our text, as he faces the call to

engage such sin, we find God revealing to him that he has prepared Jeremiah uniquely for this job. It's a truth we need to realize today as well.

Created (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

Jeremiah's concerns in responding to his call center on his own personal sense of inadequacy to the task. God responds with two arguments about Jeremiah's origins that serve to undercut such a concern directly.

The first argument God makes is that Jeremiah has eternally existed in the mind of God. His make-up, personality, placement in history and giftedness all were carefully constructed (formed) to meet the issues that God wanted addressed.

The second argument was that even Jeremiah's surface inadequacies would serve God's purposes as God's majesty often is revealed most clearly in the midst of our weaknesses (1 Cor 12:9). This truth plays out quite plainly in complaint passages of Jeremiah later in the book (11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:12-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18), where his grief and anger get the best of him and he accuses God of deceiving him (15:18), and God used it as a lesson to Israel.

While we need to be careful not to ascribe our sinful actions to God's making of us, we need to see even those elements of our personality that can sometimes be off-putting to ourselves and to others, are realities God has designed to use for his purposes and glory. The "pushy" person may be someone God can use to spread his gospel to places it would not have gone otherwise (Paul). The stubborn person may be someone God can use to stand their ground when they are facing what seems like impossible odds (Moses). The quiet, thoughtful person may be someone God uses to compose meaningful works of depth (Luke). The sensitive and emotional person may be someone God uses to connect with people in their hurts and seek justice for the wounded (Jeremiah). It's just a matter of giving God

who we are.

What elements of personality and make-up have you often asked God to change or take away? How might God use those traits for his purposes?

Watched (Jeremiah 1:11-16)

Jeremiah spends a lot of time on issues of inequity and justice in his book. People who are driven by such concerns can begin to wonder if God is involved or interested in such things as well. Here at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, God seeks to address such concerns by giving Jeremiah two visions, both of which reveal God's judgment on Jerusalem for its rejection of his instructions. Babylon would be the source of his chastisement of Israel.

The inequity and lack of justice in our world can cause fear and disenchantment with life and with God himself. Life can be overwhelming and a sense of purpose and direction in God's plan can be hard to identify. But God is not without a plan or purpose. In both our individual lives and worldwide circumstances he has a response and will judge all accordingly.

What are some of the promises concerning Christ's return that we can lean on when life seems unfair? What are some steps you can take to be of help to the downtrodden and oppressed?

Charged (Jeremiah 1:17-19)

Given the times in which Jeremiah lived and served, we should not be surprised he faced opposition for the message he brought. But there is comfort in the fact that God knew about it, prepared Jeremiah for it, watched over him as he went and strengthened him for the task.

Like most prophets, Jeremiah is told here the people would not respond to

his message. It is striking to realize of all the writing prophets, only two record people positively responding to their invitation to repentance (Haggai and Jonah). God lets Jeremiah and us know that although we will be opposed, we will not be overcome.

Too many times today, we allow ourselves to be pushed to the sideline because we fear opposition or failure. Like the prophets, we have to go into our calling and charge realizing God's call is to faithfulness, not to success. It is not that we should expect defeat; it is that we should redefine victory. If God is truly on the throne, it is victory to be on his side and to experience his good pleasure, rather than man's.

What fears do you harbor that have kept you from obedience? How can you respond to those fears and find strength in God's presence and calling?

Timothy Pierce, Ph.D., is assistant professor of religion at East Texas Baptist University.