

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for June 26: Rise above the tide

June 14, 2011

One impressive service God's word provides to believers is assistance in communicating with God during times of deep personal distress. Life before God is not merely the successful management of external life.

The Lord desires a heart-level relationship with his human creation. He created the human heart to feel deeply the impact of life. Yet God does not abandon his people to stormy waters. He ministers to his people and helps them approach him and express their concerns. The present passage of Jeremiah is a good example of God's work with the suffering heart of a committed one.

The Lord cares (Jeremiah 15:10-11)

The first nine verses of chapter 15 declare the utter hopelessness of Israel's spiritual situation. The people have turned away so completely from God that he would not even respond to the prayers of two previous intercessors: Moses and Samuel (v. 1). Proclaiming this message has earned Jeremiah more than scorn. In response, the people curse him (v. 10).

Verse 10 compares Jeremiah's position with that of lenders and borrowers. Financial misfortune drives lenders and borrowers to abuse each other verbally. Jeremiah was not involved in financial dealings, but he was maltreated similarly.

Verse 11 applies God's promise to rescue Jeremiah (see 1:8). God understood Jeremiah's situation. He not only would deliver Jeremiah from

his tormentors but cause them to seek Jeremiah's help. On other occasions (Jeremiah 21:1; 37:3; 38:14; 42:1), Jeremiah's enemies, who had no use for his message, would desire to take advantage of his status before the Lord. They would request Jeremiah to invoke God's favor and grant their wishes. God's response never satisfied Jeremiah's enemies. Nevertheless, their approach with requests was a sign of God's protection in his life.

Like Jeremiah, believers need to interpret their circumstances in light of their relationship with their Lord. Sometimes God demonstrates the truth of his presence and his care for his followers through life's opposing circumstances.

The Lord knows (Jeremiah 15:15-18)

God graciously responded to Jeremiah's interruption and continued with his message to the people (vv. 12-14). Again, Jeremiah interrupted to express his need. Chapter 15 could be facetiously titled, "How to Interrupt God, Express Frustration and Get Away with It." The point is not to promote disrespect for the Lord but to call attention to God's willingness to care for his servants.

God's gentle patience with Jeremiah is impressive. Jeremiah's knowledgeable approach to his Lord in a time of emotional need also is impressive. Jeremiah needed to express the personal impact of serving God. The Lord listened and carefully responded to his beloved servant.

In this passage, Jeremiah modeled how to express frustration respectfully to the Almighty God. In verse 15, Jeremiah acknowledged God's understanding. This is followed by a request that the Lord remember, care for him and take vengeance against his persecutors. These requests derive from Jeremiah's privilege as a faithful practitioner of the covenant.

The word "remember" does not imply God forgot about Jeremiah. Instead,

it is used to invoke God to take covenant action at this point in Jeremiah's life.

Notice also that Jeremiah refers vengeance to the Lord. Jeremiah practiced God's revealed desire in Deuteronomy 32:35 ("to avenge is mine") that discipline control anger and the impulse for vengeance. Thus Jeremiah referred his complaint to the Lord.

Verse 16 reminds God that Jeremiah "ate" God's words, that is, he "ingested" or internally applied God's words. Jeremiah was a willing practitioner of God's words. In fact, God's words were his heart's delight—the attitude of a true believer toward God's word.

Verses 16 and 17 describe Jeremiah's refusal to be associated with those who rebel against God. His words are reminiscent of Psalm 1. Jeremiah was indignant against the enemies of the Lord, just as David was indignant about the blasphemous taunting of Goliath (1 Samuel 17:26).

Jeremiah never wavered in his commitment to God. Yet he was frustrated with the unending suffering associated with his ministry. These were grievous and enduring, not insignificant, sufferings. God listens to his people, even when they vent deep-seated frustrations. He even preserved Jeremiah's complaint so believers could have an example to follow and hope that God would answer. From the human view, it seemed God abandoned Jeremiah in his troubles. Jeremiah didn't want to succumb to this thought. He needed the Lord's help because his sufferings were taking a toll.

The Lord strengthens (Jeremiah 15:19-21)

God's answer features one word root used four times in verse 19 (repent, restore, turn, turn). Jeremiah was not exempt from practicing repentance. Repentance includes both turning away from evil (and those who practice it) and turning toward God. Both aspects are emphasized in verse 19. Such

conduct made Jeremiah worthy to be God's spokesman.

Verses 20-21 promise God would make Jeremiah a wall to the people. Jeremiah would not waver in his sufferings. God would strengthen Jeremiah to resist everything people brought against him. He would not allow Jeremiah to falter. Again, God underscored his promise to rescue, save and redeem Jeremiah. Jeremiah was to stay focused, and God would handle the rest. In intense situations, God is not put off by his people's expressions of need. God wants his people to desire him and turn to him. When his people serve him and sacrifice themselves for his kingdom, God takes specific care to strengthen them.