

There are two verses of scripture from the prophet Jeremiah that are often quoted. One I have etched into a picture frame holding my college graduation picture. *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* From Jeremiah 29. The other is found in today’s scripture passage, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I concentrated you.”*

But what exactly was Jeremiah consecrated to do? Be a prophet with a very difficult message in a very trying time. He was sent to the people of Jerusalem who have now been in captivity a few months with the message that they should settle in, because their captivity is going to last a lot longer. Not necessarily the most popular or well received message. Further he was to speak out against the sin of the entire nation. You can understand why Jeremiah was resistant.

However, that may be the most relatable part of Jeremiah’s story. Not the magnitude of his call, for we are not all called to be prophets, rather his resistance to the call of God on his life. As a pastor I have had the privilege of hearing many different people’s call stories, and I can tell you that every single one, including my own, involved resistance. The first time I remember feeling as if I was to serve the church was in high school, but I ignored it because it wasn’t my plan. Then I attended an event, still intending to have a non-church vocation, but conceded to considering to be a certified lay minister. I felt pullings towards the church, even as I worked on my degrees to go another direction, but when it came time to finally apply for grad school, I couldn’t do it. I knew that I had been running away. Did this make saying yes to God any easier? No. I went to seminary, still intending to not be a pastor, but to teach at a seminary. Now here I am. Later I received a call within a call to work with others as a spiritual director, and I made up excuses about why I was too you. Yet I am standing here today as a testament to the fact that the call of God is relentless and will always win in the end.

People are wrought with excuses about why they cannot follow the path God has laid before them. They are too you. Too old. Not educated enough. They have other things going on right now. But underneath all of the excuses is the same emotion - fear. We are fearful to follow God’s call because it is going to be hard. Just look at what Jeremiah was appointed to do: pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Verbs requiring difficult actions and hard work.

When God calls for such a time as this, it should be noted that God’s call is not in our timing. God’s call involves interrupting us during what we are doing and asking us to go a new direction. Asking us to face the unknown. Of course our response is going to be fear! For the call of God is never fully explained nor convenient. It often asks us to give up more than we are willing to let go of. For Jeremiah it asked him to risk his very life to bring the people the Word of God. But the thing about the call of God is that it is relentless. You can try to ignore it all you want, but when God gives orders about what we are supposed to be doing, you can only run away from it for so long. You can only make so many excuses. Just look at the Biblical examples. Jonah was swallowed by a whale when he ran the opposite direction from God’s commands for him. Moses tried every excuse in the book, but God kept saying that he was the one who was called, not anyone else. The call of God we receive is specific to us - no one else can do it - and will not let us go. God insists that we follow.

Often we are called to do things that we do not feel equipped to do. Like David facing Goliath we feel that we are called to do the impossible, but God empowers us, giving us the gifts

we need to face any situation when the time comes. Sometimes we are called to do something that lines up with our abilities, and other times to that which we have no natural ability or talent in. But like the calling, the capacity to live into the call comes from God alone. We did not choose God, God chose us. Are you feeling called to help with the youth group, but don't know how to interact with youth? God will empower you. Are you feeling called to lead a Bible study, but don't feel that you know enough? God will provide. Do you feel God leading you to visit the sick, but don't have enough time? God will clear your schedule.

The calls that God places on each of our lives may not be as dramatic as Jeremiah, Moses, Jonah, or David's. And perhaps that's why we miss them or ignore them so easily. We expect to be called to something monumental in a very clear way, when God is calling us to be faithful to things different from the prophets daily. Are you being sent out to speak to the nation? Or are you being called to take a lay preaching course or deliver meals on wheels? To God they are all calls that require our faithful responses. All tasks that we cannot do on our own, but only through the grace and strength of God.

Sometimes we error by thinking that only the great Biblical figures are called - prophets, preachers, missionaries. But God clearly tells Jeremiah that there was a plan for his life, even before he was born. Friends, there is a plan for our lives too. There is a call issued to us by virtue of our baptisms that we are to respond to. These calls come at different times in our lives and in different ways. We do not choose our callings, God chooses us and we are to faithfully respond.

God does not tell Jeremiah that living into his call would be easy. In fact, God tells him to fear not - which in most Biblical examples means that fear in the natural response. God goes on to say that Jeremiah would be delivered and upheld by the hand of God. See that's the thing about our calls, God never sends us into them alone. Our marching orders are from God and we are upheld by God. God tells us to fear not, as well. Tells us that we will be protected and led.

Brothers and sisters, what is God calling you to do? What is the tug on your heart that won't let go? What keeps coming up even though you try to ignore it? What do you make excuses about not doing? What did you feel called to when you were younger, that you've given up on? What is God requiring of you? For some people it may be a call within a call or a call that only lasts for a short period of time. For others God may be calling you to change your vocation or reprioritize your life. Whatever God is calling you to, what will your response be? Amen.