

CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

THE POINT:

GOD VALUES EACH OF
US AND CREATED US
FOR A PURPOSE.

JEREMIAH // 1:4-10

⁴ The word of the LORD came to me: ⁵ I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

⁶ But I protested, “Oh no, Lord God! Look, I don’t know how to speak since I am only a youth.” ⁷ Then the LORD said to me: Do not say, “I am only a youth,” for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you. ⁸ **Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to rescue you. This is the LORD’s declaration.**

⁹ Then the LORD reached out his hand, touched my mouth, and told me: I have now filled your mouth with my words. ¹⁰ See, I have appointed you today over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant.

MEMORY VERSE

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KEYWORDS

a. Formed (v. 5) – The word means “created,” much like a potter would form a vase or bowl on the potter’s wheel from clay.

b. Youth (v. 6) – The term has a broad range of meaning, including those who are too young to understand the meaning and purpose of life—children or teenagers.

HOW CAN I FULFILL GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE?

It seems everyone is interested in self-discovery. Personality tests are incredibly popular. It's not uncommon to see friends list their number . . . or animal . . . or set of identifiers in their social media profile. Some use them to explain or justify their behavior. Used rightly, some personality tests can help people see their blind spots and learn how to understand and live with others who have a unique set of gifts or emotions.

The Bible offers no personality test; far better, God's Word shows us that every human being is known by God before they were born, formed by God in the womb, and has a unique purpose in this life.

Jeremiah the prophet had no personality tests in the sixth century BC, but the same questions of identity plagued him as he grappled with God's unique call on his life. The words of God to this weeping prophet can help us understand who we are as God's children. Our self-discovery comes from knowing who made us, who knows us, and who calls us into His mission.

God Has a Purpose for Us //

Jeremiah 1:4-5

Jeremiah was the son of a faithful priest during one of the most tumultuous times in the history of God's people. Living in the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the kingdom had split, Jeremiah was facing a difficult, lifelong mission that few of us would sign up for. God wanted him to speak hard and difficult truths to a people who didn't want to listen.

God wanted Jeremiah to know that his life, his calling, and the time in which he was born was not an accident. Notice how God affirmed Jeremiah: "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born." This tells us important truths about who God is and who we are.

1. **God exists outside of time.** He didn't begin. He wasn't created. He is bigger than we are. Before we were born, He knew us and knew who we would be. He's also the one who formed us. There are no "self-



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made” people, only people created and designed by a loving Designer.

2. **God values life.** Today our culture has shifting definitions of what it means to be human. But human life begins at conception—and God values that life. Life is always valuable to God, even in its earliest embryonic stages. Even when life is fragile and dependent on someone else, that human being is known and named by God.

Listen to the way God assigns personhood and value to the unborn Jeremiah in verse 5:

- I chose *you*.
- I formed *you*.
- I set you apart before *you* were born.
- I appointed *you* a prophet to the nations.

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THE TRUTH THAT GOD KNOWS YOU PERSONALLY?

At the earliest stages of life, Jeremiah was a full human being who, according to Genesis 1:26, bore the image of God. And the language God used here about “forming” Jeremiah in the womb is the same word capturing God’s creative work of forming “the man out of the dust from the ground” (Gen. 2:7).

God works the same way today. Every human being is formed with precision by our Creator. Every human being has full value from the earliest stages of life. This truth has widespread implications for how we see ourselves and how we see the world. First it reminds us that we are not our own, but were created by a loving Creator. Second, it should inform the way we see others.

God Helps Us Carry Out Our Purpose //

Jeremiah 1:6-8

We have a God who forms us and knows us before we were born, but he didn’t just leave us there. He formed Jeremiah for a purpose. For the young prophet, the call of God just seemed too difficult. Echoing the reservations Moses had about serving (Ex. 4:10), Jeremiah claimed he could not possibly be



DIGGING DEEPER JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the 13th year of King Josiah. At the Lord’s command, he neither married nor had children because of the impending judgment that would come upon the next generation. He was the prophet of the “word of the LORD” (1:2). Of the 349 times the Old Testament used the phrase “thus says the Lord,” Jeremiah accounts for 157 of them. He constantly proclaimed God’s judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, and yet he was also a prophet of hope, proclaiming oracles of salvation, conditioned (3:22-4:2) or unconditioned (30-31; 32:36-38; 33:6; 34:4). Jeremiah repeatedly warned the people about the vanity of their reliance on ritual and external formalism. His ministry as a prophet ended after 586 BC.

What example does Jeremiah set for those who want to know God’s purpose in life?



the person for the job because he was not an eloquent speaker and was just too young.

- **The excuse of deficiencies.** Even at this young age, Jeremiah knew his own deficiencies. There are good reasons to admit our limitations because God can use a person who humbles himself this way.
- **The excuse of age and inexperience.** Jeremiah's second rebuttal to God's call was his age and inexperience. The Hebrew word for "youth" could be broadly used, but its general use was to refer to a young man (in contrast to an old man or elder). How could a young prophet move a nation? Only because God said, "I will be with you."

WHAT ARE SOME EXCUSES WE USE FOR NOT DOING WHAT GOD COMMANDS US TO DO?

We can similarly take comfort that God will be with us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. God promises His presence to every believer, regardless of age or season in life. The way of the disciple is to listen to the voice of God and step into His mission.

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL AFRAID ABOUT THE WORK GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO?

God Equips Us to Fulfill Our Purpose // Jeremiah 1:9-10

God told Jeremiah, "I have now filled your mouth with my words." The call of God would not be simply about the young prophet's self-discovery. This wasn't about following his heart or pursuing his dreams. Jeremiah had a clear and unmistakable mission of God to preach judgment and salvation to God's people. Notice the two things God said in His call to Jeremiah:

1. **I have appointed you.** To be appointed is to be selected. Of all the people in the world at that time, only one—Jeremiah—was a candidate for this mission of God. He was hand-selected for a special task.
2. **I have filled you.** To be filled is to be empowered by God. For Jeremiah, God specifically filled Jeremiah's mouth with His words. What Jeremiah was preaching to the people of God were not his words, but God's divine declarations. He put words in Jeremiah's mouth. So when the people of God rejected Jeremiah, they were ultimately rejecting God Himself.

We live in an age of the Holy Spirit who is present in the church. So we can't apply what

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God said to Jeremiah in quite the same way as God applied it to Jeremiah. And yet we can take comfort in knowing that the same God who equipped a young obscure prophet to speak hard truths to Judah is the same God who fills us with His power to do what He's called us to do today.

We don't prophesy in the same way as Jeremiah, but in another sense, we are still part of God's mission to "uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant." God's new kingdom has dawned in Christ, a kingdom that is renewing and rebuilding what sin has corrupted and destroyed.

Perhaps you are wondering how God could possibly use you at your age or with your physical limitations. Take heart in knowing that if you are in Christ, God knows your name. He knew you before you were born. And your weaknesses and limitations are a perfect match for His power.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO FULFILL YOUR PURPOSE?

DID YOU KNOW?

The first section of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." This amendment was ratified in 1685 and in effect outlawed slavery in the United States. But the fight for civil rights had only begun, because whites disregarded the U.S. amendments. Laws were soon passed that called for the separation of whites and blacks. These discriminatory laws came to be known as Jim Crow laws. African-Americans were devalued and racial inequality had become a fact of everyday life. Today, the most serious concerns of the black community appear to revolve around poverty resulting from the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow.⁹

WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD IT HAVE MADE HAD AFRICAN-AMERICANS BEEN ALLOWED TO LIVE OUT THEIR PURPOSE AS FREED U.S. CITIZENS?

LIVE IT

How can we live out God's purpose in our lives?

Being used by God knows no restrictions. The way of a disciple is to listen to and obey the voice of God. The God who knows us and formed us will be with us as we live out His purpose for our lives. The words of God to Jeremiah can help us understand who we are as God's children. Our self-discovery comes from knowing who made us, who knows us, and who calls us into His mission.

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- Pray and seek God's face. Ask Him to show you the ways He can use you for His kingdom.
- Put your "yes" on the table and trust God to empower you for His service. Step out in obedience, trusting the power of the Holy Spirit, and do that for which God has called you.
- Find practical ways to help those whom the culture deems helpless to see that God values them and has a purpose for them.

DAILY READINGS

1. HEAR GOD'S VOICE // JEREMIAH 1:4

Imagine the silence around a prisoner in a jail cell or a patient in a hospital room. It can be devastating. We need to hear the voices of people or we lose something within ourselves. Jeremiah heard the voice of God speak to him at a pivotal moment in his life. This happened long ago, and it can happen today. Because he loves us, God breaks into our silence, speaking to us through His Word and through the Holy Spirit in our hearts. In the silence of our self-absorption, we may be tempted to wait for a more pleasing voice, but there is no other true speech. Open up your heart and hear the voice of God today.

God speaks all the time. Ask Him to help you hear His voice.

2. SET APART // JEREMIAH 1:5

A true prophetic ministry begins with a call from God. Being a prophet is not a ministry that just anyone can take up. Only false prophets dare to take this up for themselves. Jeremiah was set apart before he was born for the work of prophecy. Like Jeremiah, we were set apart before we were born. There is a work that God has earmarked for each of us. He knows where He wants each of us. When we seek God and draw near to Him, His calling will be revealed in our lives. If you want to know your calling, spend time in God's presence through prayer and worship.

Ask the Lord for His guidance and His direction, and He will lead you to your Spirit-led calling.

3. BE CONTENT // JEREMIAH 1:6

Complaining can be a favorite pastime of many people. They complain about the weather; they complain about their food; they complain, complain, complain. Even when things are going well, they complain. Jeremiah complained to God because

he did not believe he was right for what God called him to do. Through complaining, he had fallen into the devil's trap. And if he had followed through, he would not have fulfilled the calling on his life. Paul calls us to do everything without grumbling or complaining (Phil. 2:14). Is this possible? Yes, when we learn to concentrate on God's grace in Christ. How can we complain so often when we know we are loved by God? His grace can move us from a complaining attitude to an attitude of gratitude.

God can help you to be content and thankful. Ask for forgiveness when you complain. Find contentment within yourself.

4. POWER OF SUPPORT // COLOSSIANS 3:14

Depression runs deep and can color your whole outlook on life. Its devastation in the lives of people places it in the mental illness category. Elijah struggled with that type of depression (1 Kings 18–19). He felt hopeless, alone, and afraid. He had low self-esteem and wanted to die. But God had a solution for Elijah. He sent supporters that ministered to him and met his needs. Soon Elijah was encouraged and regained his focus. Don't underestimate your influence when someone is feeling blue.

Your prayers and ministry to those who are feeling blue can stimulate the hope they need to recover.

5. DON'T QUIT // GALATIANS 6:9

Depression and the blues may take a while to overcome. If day after day you feel increasingly hopeless, seek help. And no matter how afraid you are, no matter how anxious you are about tomorrow, no matter how sad and helpless you feel, don't quit! God will never, ever give up on you, so don't you give up on Him. Don't believe the lie of the enemy, that your sadness will never end.

Trust that no matter how long it will take, God is working in your heart and in your life so that you can be refreshed and restored.



Discipline Yourself

JASON THOMAS

Being a Christian is a matter of faith, hope, and trust. These are some of the foundational aspects of our Christian life. A believer's journey began with confessing Christ as Savior wherein a life of infinite joy ensues. Our conversion is a once and forever experience, but being disciplined in our spiritual life will take time and practice to bring us to spiritual maturity.

We live in a world with unending distractions at every turn. In fact, for most of us, we major in the minor of virtual reality, which is not a reality at all. These distractions can potentially disrupt our focus on spiritual things that help to nurture our relationship with God. However, the practice of spiritual disciplines focus us upward, outward, and inward. Spiritual disciplines include prayer; Bible reading and study; confession of sins to one another; regular

repentance; Scripture memory and meditation on the Word; regular gatherings with other believers; fasting; service; generosity; acts of kindness or mercy; and all kinds of outreach. This is not an exhaustive list. But from that list believers should, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, daily practice those disciplines that will strengthen spiritual prowess and help with upward, outward and inward spiritual growth and maturity.

Focus Upward

Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 9 that the world has positioned all kinds of perishable rewards before our eyes, especially in the sports arena. The only way an athlete can possess these earthly rewards is by becoming the best in whatever talent or skill required for winning. Athletes will spend many weeks of training and practicing for only a two-hour

competition. The athlete will be the victor if he or she beats the other team through individual or coordinated efforts. However, many times competition does not stop there. The earthly reward must often be defended against a new opponent. This requires that the athlete keep a downward focus on the next competition.

However, a confessed Christian must develop passions and disciplines that can lead toward eternal rewards which causes us to focus upward. The practice of spiritual disciplines is evidence that we cannot become spiritually strong in our own strength nor can we ever hope to gain the favor of God. We do experience God's presence as we place our faith, hope, and trust in the work of Christ. One of the spiritual disciplines that allows us to have this experience is the reading and study of the Word of God.

According to Donald Whitney, "No Spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word."¹ The reading of the Bible provides a conduit of the Holy Spirit by which we catch a glimpse of Almighty God Himself. God in His providence wants to lavish His love on us, and His Word contains "how" in every page. But we can only learn this by surrendering our own desires and being submitted to Jesus Christ. Paul was committed to living this way, and he gave insights on where his life would be without the disciplines: he would be a disqualified and struggling Christian.

Focus Outward

Our way forward in this Christian journey is to become practitioners in the spiritual disciplines. The Christ-directed life should not be a life of isolation. If we want to grow even more, then we should extend our focus beyond ourselves. God's love for us demands this. Therefore His love through us should transform into service to others. The spiritual disciplines of generosity, kindness, mercy and outreach allow us to use the love we gain from God to serve the world. Ultimately, proclamation of the gospel message is more readily received from hearts that extend these disciplines.

As we focus outward, Christians lose the desire to live selfishly. Paul said in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves." Even Jesus lived His life teaching about the importance of reaching outward through healing the sick, raising the dead, and other acts of service.

Focus Inward

Living in the presence of God and the power to serve those around us is developed through a life that is dedicated not only upward and outward, but also inward. Spiritual disciplines transform the inward life. There are Scriptures that command our practice of spiritual discipline that will impact us individually. We will grow as we obediently read and study God's Word, pray, meditate, confess, and fast. This is important for us to understand. The Holy Spirit is given to aid our growth but only as we cooperate with Him. As Christians, we can worry about a great many things, but the beauty of why we are saved is that God wants us to become successful as spiritual beings. Spiritual disciplines reveal to us that our lives are to be lived from the inside out so that we can follow in the footsteps of Christ and be readied to live for eternity in heaven..

As we dive into living our lives as followers of Christ, we must understand that we are called to focus upward, outward, and inward. The spiritual disciplines allow us to practically order our lives in such a way to make this a reality. God eternally works in our lives, so that we will have the freedom to experience Christ through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

1. Dennis Lee, *From Here to There: A Journey to Spiritual Transformation*, (Xulon Press) 2015, p. 118.

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