

Jer. 1:4–10

Ps. 71:1–6

1 Cor. 13:1–13

Luke 4:21–30

Called to Do What?

**Goal for
the Session**

Hearing Jeremiah’s call to pull down and then plant, adults will explore God’s call to similar acts of ministries today.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Jeremiah 1:4–10

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Gene M. Tucker

At this point the dialogue is over, and the ritual of ordination begins. As befits designation for the prophetic role (see Isa. 6:5–7; Ezek. 2:8–3:3), YHWH touches Jeremiah’s mouth and establishes his office “over nations and over kingdoms” and gives him the message he is to deliver (vv. 9–10). If one thinks of the experience of a call as an inner experience, here it quickly moves out into the world of international politics. God means to shape the history of nations through the word of a solitary human being. The voice of God through Jeremiah is to actually bring about destruction, and then rebuilding.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James Calvin Davis

Against a view of religion as essentially a private matter, God puts words into the mouth of the prophet that give him authority “over nations and over kingdoms.” The word of God is thus a dynamic force that at times stands in opposition to the inertia of culture and politics. While the overall tenor of Jeremiah’s commission is judgment, the destructive imperatives are followed by a constructive pair; Jeremiah is appointed not only “to pluck up and pull down” but “to build and to plant.” Jeremiah is commissioned to take to God’s people the message of death *and* rebirth—so that even in the forecast of judgment lies the promise of new life.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” George H. Martin

The reasons for not doing something that relates to God’s work are often reasonable and justifiable. Most of us aren’t trained for these tasks, or if trained we are ill prepared. Yet if God’s call is about skills or experience, God does not tell this to Jeremiah. God does not say, “Don’t worry, I have a trade school for prophets. You will get it all there.” Instead, God says, “Do not be afraid,” which just happens to be an angelic message rather common in the biblical story.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” James C. Howell

The order is everything: before building and planting, you break down and pluck up. Spiritually we prefer just some building addition, some planting to spruce up the place a bit, so that we can hang on to what we already have: we are attached to it, we earned it. But when the gospel dawns, the whole structure has to be ripped out, every growth in the garden plowed into fresh dirt so the gardener, the builder, can start over. No good life from God can grow without our dying to our old self, as old, bogus priorities are tossed aside, the house of cards cast down.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 1:4–10

Focus on Your Teaching

“Out with the old, in with the new.” Some adults in your group may recognize the truth of those words when it comes to home repairs. If a foundation is rotten, sagging beams and unstable footings need to be removed and replaced. Even more adults will likely be familiar with the truth of these words relationally. Old attitudes of prejudice, old ways of getting one’s way by coercion, need to be discarded if room is to be made for renewed relationship. Today’s Scripture about Jeremiah’s call can encourage adults to discern faith’s calling.

Guide me, O God, in discerning your call to me in leading this session, that I may know what to toss out and what to build on. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for February 10, 2019

For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 1
- option 2: Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: hymnal/songbook with “The Summons” (“Will You Come and Follow Me”)

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome adults and introduce any guests or visitors.

Have adults recall an experience in their lives where they had to make a fresh start. Ask for silent reflection (pause between questions to allow time for consideration):

- ✪ What did you have to let go of in order to make that new beginning?
- ✪ What did you have to replace it with?
- ✪ What was harder for you: letting go or taking on?

Choose partners. Without disclosing any part of the remembered experience they are uncomfortable revealing, discuss with partners:

- ✪ the difficulties of letting go and taking on when it comes to new beginnings
- ✪ the importance of both of those movements.

Relate that today’s focus scripture challenges us with God’s call to faithfulness.

Lead the group in prayer using this one or a prayer of your choosing:

Open us, O God, to your Spirit’s renewing movement—through this Scripture and this gathered community—that we may see the ways you beckon us to follow. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

The dates alluded to in Jeremiah 1:1–3 set Jeremiah’s ministry between 627 BCE and 587 BCE, thus prior to and shortly after Jerusalem’s destruction by Babylon. Use study Bible introductions and commentaries to find other helpful information on the context.

EXPLORING

Have the group read Jeremiah 1:1–3 in silence. Invite adults to share what they know of Jeremiah (book and/or prophet) as well as any of the kings mentioned, and offer background you have gleaned that will help set the context for today’s passage.

Ask for two volunteers to read Jeremiah 1:4–10. One will read the dialogue attributed to God; one will read the response of Jeremiah. Carry out the reading. Invite general comments about the passage and questions it may raise.

Form three small groups to explore how this story of Jeremiah’s call compares to other call stories in the Old Testament. Assign one group to Moses (Exodus 3:1–4:17), one group to Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–13), and one group to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1–10). Have each group answer these questions as they discuss their assigned text:

- ✪ How does an encounter with God take place?
- ✪ What is the prophet commissioned to do by God?
- ✪ What ritual act or sign symbolizes this commissioning?
- ✪ What objections, if any, are raised by the one called to be a prophet?

After small groups work, gather together and have each group report their findings on the four issues. Name the common elements found in these call stories.

Focus on the objections raised to these calls. Have the group rank the objections based on what is most persuasive to the least persuasive. Discuss their reasons for the rankings. Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Jeremiah 1:4–10). Read the “So What?” excerpt. Ask:

- ✪ What does this tell us about the responsibilities of those called by God to speak God’s truth?
- ✪ Name others (including but not limited to prophets) who are told not to be afraid.

Invite adults to recall the context and background disclosed at the opening of Exploring, and then to imagine themselves as Jeremiah receiving God’s call. Read verse 10 aloud. Discuss:

- ✪ What is it you hear God asking you to do?
- ✪ What do you see as the risks of this calling?
- ✪ What will be hardest for you to do; why?

Read the “Where?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Talk about its phrase, “inertia of culture and politics”—as you understand it existed in Jeremiah’s time; as you experience it in your own time. Move on to focus on the final sentence of the excerpt.

- ✪ What sort of death and rebirth might this passage encourage to be played out in our day?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Dynamic Balance** Pulling down and building up form the dynamic balance for our response to God's call to ministry that renews. Have adults read the "Now What?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Do a continuum exercise. Those who completely agree with the excerpt stand on one side of the room, those who completely disagree stand on the other, with various degrees of agreement and disagreement represented by standing closer to one side or another. Afterwards, discuss why people stand where they do. Lift up the points with which people disagree, or have questions, and talk about the importance of holding these two movements of deconstruction and construction in balance in our life and faith.
- 2. Renewal Works** God's dynamic call evokes actions on our part that seek renewal in our lives and communities. Ask adults to silently read Resource Sheet 2, using the questions there for personal reflection. Offer adults a choice, to either spend more time alone or to find one or more persons with whom they might collaborate on one of the "works" of pulling down or building up. Affirm this small group time could be used for further reflection and conversation, and/or planning actions they will take.
- 3. A Song of Our Call** Music often touches our spirits with God's call. Distribute songbooks and turn to "The Summons" ("Will You Come and Follow Me"). Play or hum the tune alone, if adults are unfamiliar with it. Lead (or have a church musician) lead the singing. Afterwards, invite adults to make connections between the words and melody of the song with the passage from Jeremiah—and how we hear and receive God's call in our lives. Option: Listen to a recording of this hymn on YouTube.

John Bell, the hymn's author, is a minister in the Church of Scotland and works with the Iona Community there, whose members intentionally live in community marked by worship, study, and justice ministries. The tune is a traditional Scottish melody.

CLOSING

Gather the group in a circle. Invite participants to silently identify something this passage and session calls on them to build up or plant in their lives. Ask: What is one thing you will do this week to go about that building or planting?

Offer the following prayer as both a benediction and commissioning that flows from these thoughts.

Holy God, give us the wisdom to let go of that which no longer serves your good, and the courage to build and plant that which is your good in our lives and in all creation. Amen.

If you chose Responding option 3, sing the final stanza of "The Summons."

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for February 10, 2019, or e-mail it to the participants early in the week, so that they have adequate time to reflect on the Scripture passages and the excerpts throughout the coming week.

Focus on Jeremiah 1:4–10

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Gene M. Tucker

At this point the dialogue is over, and the ritual of ordination begins. As befits designation for the prophetic role (see Isa. 6:5–7; Ezek. 2:8–3:3), YHWH touches Jeremiah’s mouth and establishes his office “over nations and over kingdoms” and gives him the message he is to deliver (vv. 9–10). If one thinks of the experience of a call as an inner experience, here it quickly moves out into the world of international politics. God means to shape the history of nations through the word of a solitary human being. The voice of God through Jeremiah is to actually bring about destruction, and then rebuilding.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James Calvin Davis

Against a view of religion as essentially a private matter, God puts words into the mouth of the prophet that give him authority “over nations and over kingdoms.” The word of God is thus a dynamic force that at times stands in opposition to the inertia of culture and politics. While the overall tenor of Jeremiah’s commission is judgment, the destructive imperatives are followed by a constructive pair; Jeremiah is appointed not only “to pluck up and pull down” but “to build and to plant.” Jeremiah is commissioned to take to God’s people the message of death *and* rebirth—so that even in the forecast of judgment lies the promise of new life.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” George H. Martin

The reasons for not doing something that relates to God’s work are often reasonable and justifiable. Most of us aren’t trained for these tasks, or if trained we are ill prepared. Yet if God’s call is about skills or experience, God does not tell this to Jeremiah. God does not say, “Don’t worry, I have a trade school for prophets. You will get it all there.” Instead, God says, “Do not be afraid,” which just happens to be an angelic message rather common in the biblical story.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”
James C. Howell

The order is everything: before building and planting, you break down and pluck up. Spiritually we prefer just some building addition, some planting to spruce up the place a bit, so that we can hang on to what we already have: we are attached to it, we earned it. But when the gospel dawns, the whole structure has to be ripped out, every growth in the garden plowed into fresh dirt so the gardener, the builder, can start over. No good life from God can grow without our dying to our old self, as old, bogus priorities are tossed aside, the house of cards cast down.

The Work to Which We Are Called

The Work of Breaking Down



In 1989, the Berlin Wall came crashing down—but it did not happen overnight. The cracks began to form shortly after it was erected in 1961, when courage and desperation moved individuals to escape over or under it—sometimes at the cost of their lives. The cracks later continued when communities gathered for peace marches in Leipzig in defiance of security forces, knowing their actions might be met with violence.

Change and renewal do not come overnight, or without risk to status quos.

In your life, what “walls” need to be broken: walls that divide you from God; from neighbor; from self? What might God be calling you to do through this passage to begin the demolition?

In the wider community and world (and congregation), what “walls” need to be broken: walls of hatred; walls of economies and power skewed for the sake of the few? What might God be calling you to do through this passage, on your own and with others, to pull down those weights upon the human spirit?

The Work of Building Up



It is said the devil, like nature, abhors a vacuum. If faith and spiritual growth are limited to works of pulling down and uprooting, the landscape of our lives and communities will be empty and barren. New structures and values need to be erected when others have passed their time.

In your life, what are your greatest needs of building up, of planting new values or new ways? What works of rebuilding might God be calling and empowering you to do in your life—and where, and with whom, might you find the support and courage to begin this work?

In your wider community, world, and congregation, what stands in need of new construction and replanting? What might God be calling and empowering you to do, on your own and with others, to engage in such rebuilding?