

Jer. 1:4–10

Ps. 71:1–6

1 Cor. 13:1–13

Luke 4:21–30

Embracing the Call

Goal for the Session *Through Jeremiah’s story, youth will lay aside their doubts and embrace God’s call to act for justice in the world.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

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

Conversations about vocation and calling often turn into dialogues about what youth want to be when they grow up. Many youth strive so hard to succeed as adults that they are barely living now, whereas others have given up trying and live only for the moment. Jeremiah's story offers a third option: to see our call as multifaceted. God's call to justice is ongoing and fundamental, inciting us to act, speak, and listen now. Our lifelong vocation may come tomorrow—or in twenty years.

O God, guide me as I live out my call even in small ways today. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- index cards
 - pens
 - Bibles
 - copies of Resource Sheet 1
- For Responding:
- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
 - option 3: newspapers and newsmagazines
- For Web Connection:
- Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Give each participant two index cards and a pen. On one index card, have them write a funny excuse for why someone might not want to do something, such as having a hurt toe. On the other index card, have them write their dream job, such as video game tester. Collect and shuffle the cards in separate stacks. Give each participant an opportunity to select a card from each pile and read the combination aloud using this phrase: I'd love to be a [insert job title], but I can't because [insert excuse].

Ask:

- ✪ What are some real reasons not to want to take on a job like one of these?
- ✪ What's the difference between an excuse and a doubt?
- ✪ What makes you doubt yourself?

Tell participants that today they'll be learning about the prophet Jeremiah, who was asked to do something challenging and had to respond.

Pray:

Holy God, we are gathered and ready to hear your Word. As we seek your face, bless our conversation, our words and our thoughts. In Christ, Amen.

EXPLORING

Ask youth to turn to Jeremiah 1 in their Bibles. Offer the following background information:

- ✪ Jeremiah is a book of prophecy written around the time Israel was conquered by Babylon.
- ✪ Prophecy isn't about predicting the future. Instead, it's a word from God to warn us of consequences when we're treating others in unjust ways and to promise us that God also restores and rebuilds.

- ✪ Call stories in the Bible are stories in which God calls people to do something or to be something.
- ✪ Call stories in the Bible aren't just special privileges. They're always a call to a task, role, or message.

Have participants stand (if they are able) and close their eyes. Read aloud Jeremiah 1:4–10 one verse at a time. After each verse is read, have participants create poses with their bodies that correspond with something they heard in the verse. Have participants open their eyes and see the others' poses before closing their eyes to hear the next verse read. After the reading, discuss:

- ✪ What is Jeremiah called to?
- ✪ What is your reaction to Jeremiah's initial response to God's call?
- ✪ If you were in Jeremiah's place and God called you, how would you feel? What would you say? What concerns would you have?

Give each person a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (The Enquiring Exile) and a pen. Read together the information on the resource sheet. Have a volunteer read aloud Jeremiah 1:10. Then, have participants underline words on the resource sheet that remind them of Jeremiah 1:10. Give participants an opportunity to read what they underlined to the rest of the group. Discuss:

- ✪ Based on Jeremiah's prophecies, what does it sound like happened to the Israelites?
- ✪ Why do you think God lists the destruction first in verse 10?
- ✪ Why might it be so important that Jeremiah be called by God to this particular prophecy to tear down and rebuild, uproot and plant?

Have participants circle words or phrases in the stories on the resource sheet that show how people felt about Jeremiah in his own time. When all are finished, give participants an opportunity to read their circled words and phrases to the rest of the group. Ask:

- ✪ If Jeremiah had just decided that he wanted to be a prophet without God's call or support, what might have been some risks for him?
- ✪ Despite the danger, what are the benefits to Jeremiah when he accepts God's call? What are the benefits to others?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Get Up, Stand Up** Participants will explore God's call to act for justice. Give each participant a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Get Up, Stand Up) and a pen. Have participants work individually to read the quotation on the page and reflect on the questions.

EASY
PREP

- 2. Intentional Conversation** Participants converse about God's call to act for justice in the world. Form pairs of participants and have partners sit facing each other. Ask the questions below one at a time. After each question is asked, give one person in each pair thirty seconds to respond to the question. Then, give the other person in each pair thirty seconds to respond to the question. Finally, lead a conversation with the entire group that responds to the questions:
- ✪ What are some doubts you sometimes have about your abilities?
 - ✪ How might God be empowering, equipping, and supporting you past your doubts?
 - ✪ How is God calling you to something like blessing or justice through your abilities?
- 3. Reading and Responding** Participants will discuss ways to respond to injustices in the world. Make recent newspapers and newsmagazines available to the participants. Have them select an article from a magazine about injustice. Give participants an opportunity to present their articles to the rest of the group. Then, discuss faithful responses to the injustice.

CLOSING

Gather in a circle and invite participants to join you in a body prayer. Explain that while our voices are important, our whole bodies and lives can speak God's call to justice. Model the actions for your group to follow.

Pray together:

God, we clench our fists in fear and doubt (clench fists)

But just like you reached out (hands reach forward)

And touched Jeremiah's mouth (hand to mouth)

So he could speak your words (hand to throat)

Put your hand on our shoulders (hand on shoulder of neighbor)

Move with us (spread arms)

Call us to your work with your people (hands on hips)

And guide and protect us always in Jesus. Amen. (hands crossed over chest)

■ ENHANCEMENT

WEB CONNECTION

The Barron Prize is awarded annually to young people who have made a significant difference in the world. Go to barronprize.org to explore some of the recent winners together. Discuss:

- ✪ Where is it clear that these young people felt passionate and even called to do these big projects?
- ✪ If you had one audacious dream for something you could do with your abilities to affect the world for good, what would it be?

The Enquiring Exile

Weekly Prophet Profile

The famous (or infamous?) prophet Jeremiah. Many thought he was too young. Vaulted to stardom as a teen prophet sensation for fiery prophecies of destruction and strange antics like dragging around a torn linen belt, Jeremiah was known as “the Weeping Prophet” for his sad messages. Not popular among his greedy peers and the unjust kings of Israel, this renegade still inspired two bestsellers: Jeremiah and Lamentations.

Brothers from Another Mother?

Jeremiah has frequently been compared to Moses. Both gave warnings and teachings about the Law, and both had to bring sad messages when the Israelites failed to do justice to one another and live peacefully. Jeremiah’s tragic message was that Israel’s people would be plucked up and exiled from their land. But through him, God also promised the people would prosper and grow in Babylon, that they would plant gardens and build homes—and return again to Israel one day.



Critic’s Take

Jeremiah may have had a lot of harsh words for Israel and others, but it’s amazing that when God speaks through prophets, there is promise of new life in their harsh words of condemnation.

Get Up, Stand Up

“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. . .’ ”

—from “So What?” excerpt

Reflection Questions

What are some excuses we make for not doing what we should do, or what God calls us to do?

When is it legitimately OK to be intimidated or even afraid to stand up for justice?

When is it more important to stand up and follow God’s call to follow than to remain afraid? What’s at stake when we say “not today”?

