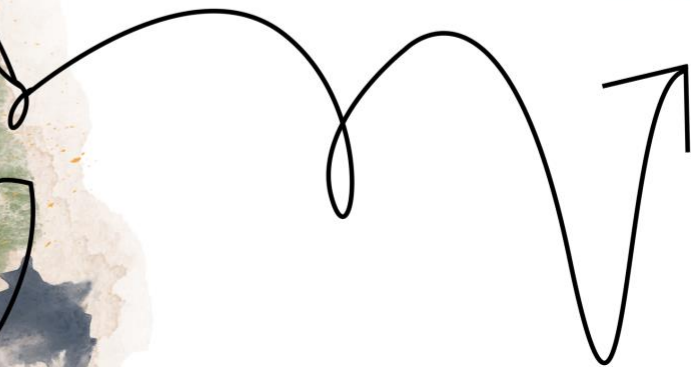
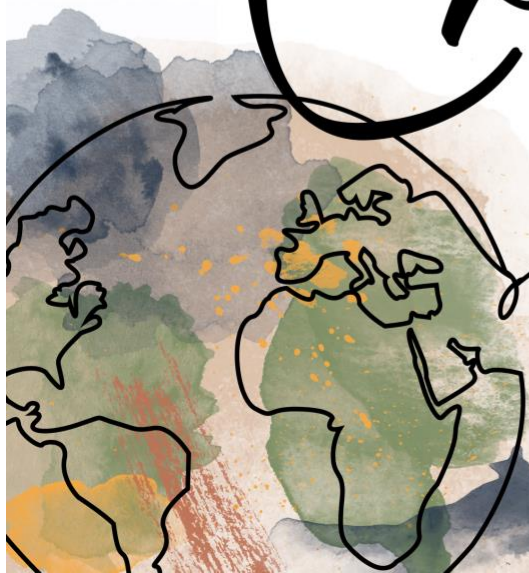




No

Excuses

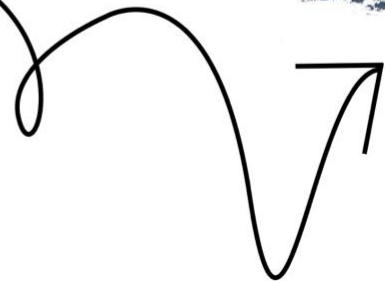




“Then the Lord said to me:
Do not say, “I am only a youth,”
for you will go to everyone
I send you to and speak
whatever I tell you.”



Jeremiah 1:7



The Jeremiah Challenge Devotional

“No More Excuses”

Day 1: “His Plan is Better”

If you are reading this right now, you have decided to take the “Jeremiah Challenge”, or at least to see what it’s all about. My hope is that after the next few days, you will be ready to commit and declare the following: “Lord I am ready to stop making excuses and go **ALL in** on whatever You ask me to do. **NO MORE EXCUSES!**” On our journey to get there, we are going to be taking a deeper look at the call of the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 1.

Before you begin reading Day 1’s Scripture, it’s important to note the difference between a Priest and a Prophet in Jeremiah’s time. Here is a brief job description of a priest: Standing guard in God’s house, making sacrifices for God’s people, and teaching God’s people so that they could enjoy God’s blessings. A prophet’s job description looked like this: Receive a message from God and deliver that message to God’s people.

Ultimately, here is the difference between a prophet and priest: a priest represents the people to God, and a prophet represents God to His people. With this in mind, let’s read about God’s call of Jeremiah:

Read Jeremiah 1:1-5

Verse 1 states that Jeremiah was the son of a priest. In those days, sons of priests usually became... you guessed it: priests. Jeremiah was more than likely preparing to one day become a priest like his father. A young man would typically start carrying out the duties of a priest at age 20-25. While Jeremiah had most likely been preparing to be a priest his whole life, God had other plans. Scholars say that Jeremiah was somewhere between the age of 17 to 20 when God called him to be a prophet instead of a priest. Plot twist, wouldn’t you say? In verse 5, God wrecks Jeremiah’s plans and tells him “I set you apart before you were born. I

appointed you a **prophet** to the nations.” I am sure Jeremiah was reluctant, but ultimately, He followed God’s plan over his own.

Do you have plans for your own life? Do you have a daily routine or specific things that you plan on doing in the future? You may have your entire future mapped out. Or, you may just have plans to be involved in extracurricular activities (like sports, choir, FFA, etc.). Regardless of if it's a 5-year plan or a semester plan, we ALL make plans for our lives. The question is: *are we willing to surrender our plans if God has something **different** in mind?* Often, we fill our schedules up and we are so busy to the point that even if God wanted to change our plans, we would be too busy to fit **His plans** into **our schedule**.

Like Jeremiah, we must be willing to surrender our plans to God and be willing to change them if He leads us to do so. Busyness CANNOT be an excuse. Being uncomfortable CANNOT be an excuse. Even though we may not understand God’s mind, we can ALWAYS trust His heart. Spend some time meditating on this scripture:

*Trust in the LORD with **all** your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding;
in **all** your ways know him, and **He will** make your paths straight.*
- Proverbs 3:5-6

Do you know what God is asking you to do? Are you willing to lay your plans down to follow the Lord’s Plans? For you to take the “Jeremiah challenge” you need to be willing to submit your plans to God like Jeremiah did. Spend some time talking to the Lord and LISTENING to Him about these things:

- “Lord, what are your plans for me? Make them clear to me in Your timing”
- “Lord, I have a plan for my life, but help me to know that Your plan is better”
- “Lord, forgive me for when I have followed my plan instead of Yours.”

Application:

1. Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

2. What are some plans that you have made for your life that God may be asking you to lay down? Are you WILLING to lay them down?

Day 2: “Born for This”

The famous writer Mark Twain once said, “The two most important days in your life are the day that you are born and the day you find out why [you were born].” While I personally may not fully agree with Mr. Twain, he does highlight one of the most important things a human being can discover: what they were made for.

Read Jeremiah 1:4-5

Jeremiah might have thought he was born to be a priest, but the Lord revealed to Him that he was instead, born for something else. The Lord made it clear that Jeremiah was made to be a prophet and not a priest like he thought. What about you? What were you made for? As a follower of Jesus, it is important that we get our answers for these enormous questions from God’s Word:

*This is eternal life: that they may **know** you, the only true God, and the one you have sent - Jesus Christ.
- John 17:3*

*Fear God and keep his commandments, for **this is the whole duty of man.**
-Ecclesiastes 12:13*

***Go, therefore, and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- Matthew 28:19-20*

The Bible makes our purpose clear: To KNOW God and to MAKE HIM KNOWN to others. This might sound way too simple, but that’s because it is. God intended it that way. The problem is, we as humans love to overcomplicate things. There’s a reason Jesus tells us to have faith like a child. A child’s faith is simple and has a single focus. The distractions of life haven’t set in for a child like they have for an

adult. Friend, God has a purpose for your life: To know Him and to make Him known. That's it! The question is: Are you overcomplicating it? Are other things getting in the way?

Like Jeremiah, God has set you apart. He has chosen you and created you for a specific purpose. I am simply saying: **YOU WERE BORN FOR THIS!** Maybe you are trying to figure out exactly what it is that God is leading you to do. What career path to go down; What college to go to; Who to marry. These are all good questions and it's totally normal to ask them. I believe as you trust in the Lord and wait patiently on His timing, He will begin to make those things clearer to you. However, you don't have to wait to know exactly what the Lord wants you to do **RIGHT NOW**. The Bible simply gives us the clear command to: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength." Then, lead others to do the same. Share the Good News of what Jesus has done for them. This is what you were made for. **YOU WERE BORN FOR THIS!**

Application:

- 1) Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

- 2) Today we looked at our purpose as a follower of Jesus: "To know God and to make Him known to others." Would you say that you are fulfilling your purpose? Why or why not?

- 3) What in your life needs to change in order for you to fulfill God's purpose for your life?

Day 3: "Excuses, Excuses"

I am not good at a lot of things, but one thing I am really good at is making excuses. In fact, humans in general are very good at making excuses. Reader's digest has an article called "60 Most Ridiculous Excuses People Actually Used to Get out of Work". Some of the excuses are "A man claimed his grandma poisoned him with ham"; "An employee had to attend the funeral of his wife's cousin's pet, and he was a pallbearer"; or my personal favorite "An employee could not come to work because she was bitten by a duck."

We can be really creative in our excuses, even in our relationship with God. Often when God calls us to obedience, we will find any excuse we can to avoid the discomfort. Because if we are honest, most things He calls us to aren't exactly fun or easy. However, when we look at Jeremiah's story, we see we aren't alone in this. When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, Jeremiah had some excuses too.

Read Jeremiah 1:5-6

When God told Jeremiah what He was asking of him, Jeremiah had two excuses: Lack of experience because of his age, and lack of skill or ability. As we talked about in Day 1, scholars believe that Jeremiah was between the ages of 17-20 when God called him to be a prophet. Because of his age, Jeremiah seems to think that this will directly affect his ability to be able to speak to people. If you are not familiar with the Bible, there is another character who used the excuse of not being a great speaker to try to avoid what God was calling him to. In fact, he used every excuse he could think of to avoid doing what God was asking of him. His name was Moses. Let's look at one of Moses' excuses:

"Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue. The LORD said to him, "Who gave human

beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else."

- Exodus 4:10-12

No matter how many times the Lord tried to reassure Moses, he replied with an excuse. Eventually Moses was obedient and did what God called him to do. When he stepped out in faith and obedience, Moses was able to see God do things that he probably never dreamed of. So, let me ask you: **Are you making excuses for not going ALL in with Jesus and fulfilling your purpose?** Remember our purpose isn't complicated. If you look back to Day 2, our purpose is simple: To KNOW God and to MAKE HIM KNOWN to others. What is your excuse for not fulfilling this purpose? Maybe it's fear of what other people will think of you. Maybe it's that you are 'too busy'. Maybe it's like Jeremiah or Moses' excuse, in that you are "inexperienced" or "don't speak well." Maybe it's that you don't think you know enough to tell someone about Jesus and are afraid they will have a question you can't answer. Maybe it's even that you have become swallowed up by sin and you aren't even thinking about fulfilling God's purpose for your life.

Something that the Lord has been showing me recently is that my excuses reveal this hard truth: **I have placed more faith in my own level of skill or ability than I have in God who created me AND my abilities.** God wasn't asking Jeremiah to get more experience or become a better speaker. God was simply calling Jeremiah to TRUST HIM and step towards Him in FAITH. I PROMISE you, if you are simply willing to leave your excuses behind and take a step towards the Lord in faith, you will be AMAZED at what He can do through you. We will talk more about that in the next day's devotional.

Application:

- 1) Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

- 2) You just read that the great prophet Jeremiah made excuses when God called him. What excuses have you made in the past to avoid living the way God wanted you to live?

- 3) What excuses are you making right now to avoid going ALL in with Jesus and making Him the number 1 priority in your life? Write those excuses down.

Day 4: “No More Excuses”

I am a big fan of movies. In fact, I come from a family that loves watching movies together. When I read the passage we are going to look at today, a particular scene from the football movie “Remember the Titans” comes to mind. During a scene in the movie a star player named Petey is frustrated because of the unfair treatment he receives from the referees. While the team is in a timeout, a coach tries to give Petey some correction and he responds, “Coach, they are calling a holding penalty on me every time.” The coach looks at him and asks him a simple question “Did I ask for your excuses?”. Read the passage and you will understand what I mean:

Read Jeremiah 1:4-10

God tells Jeremiah what the plan is. Jeremiah makes excuses. Then God in His own way tells Jeremiah “I didn’t ask for your excuses”. God is telling me and you the same thing He told Jeremiah: NO MORE EXCUSES! However, God doesn’t scold him for making excuses. God gives him **three** things in these verses that would encourage Jeremiah to step out in faith to follow God’s call for his life.

1) A Clear Command (verse 7)

- God made Jeremiah’s task simple: 1) Go to WHO I send you and 2) say WHAT I tell you to say. As we discussed on day 2, God tries to keep His call for us simple. We are the ones who tend to overcomplicate it.

2) A Comforting Promise (verse 8)

- The promise God gives Jeremiah is “I will be WITH you.” God never asks you to do something where He hasn’t already gone before you and doesn’t plan to go WITH you. Jesus makes a similar promise to us after giving us our mission in Matthew 28:18-20: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

3) A Confident Commissioning (verses 9-10)

- After making the command clear and promising he would be with Jeremiah, God then empowers Jeremiah to do what he's commanded. God touches Jeremiah's mouth and says, "I have now filled your mouth with my words." You and I can be confident of this: God always plans to provide us with what we NEED, in order to do what He has called us to do. When God commissions us, he has our marching orders in one hand and in the other hand He has a tool belt with all the tools we will need to accomplish the task. There's a popular quote that we can always remember: "God does not call the equipped, He equips the called."

Let's go back to the "Remember the Titans" scene I talked about earlier. If you haven't seen the movie, when the coach tells his player to stop making excuses the player takes his helmet off and walks away to sit on the bench. As a result, he gets to watch his team overcome and win the game from the sideline. God doesn't want us to make excuses and sit on the sidelines while His kingdom grows. He wants us to leave our excuses on the sideline and GET IN THE GAME! He wants us to step out in faith knowing that He is going to provide what He requires of us. NO MORE EXCUSES!

Application:

- 1) Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

- 2) God gave Jeremiah 3 things that gave Jeremiah confidence to do what God asked of him. Which one of those impacts you the most? Why?

- 3) Write out your excuses for going ALL in with Jesus from yesterday's devotion below. Find a scripture that you can remember that speaks directly to that excuse. (It's ok to use google)

Day 5: "WHO is God Sending You To?"

When I was in high school, I had one BIG overarching question that haunted me in my junior and senior year: "What am I going to do with my life?" It's an important question. If I'm honest, it's an overwhelming question. It's a question that everyone asks at some point. Over the years, this question has evolved to "What is God calling me to?" or even "Where is God sending me?" Recently, the Lord has challenged me to ask a different question. This question has convicted me and showed me just how much I overcomplicate my walk with Jesus. The question is: "WHO is the Lord sending me to?"

Read Jeremiah 1:6-7

Remember God's simple command to Jeremiah: **Go** to WHO I send you and **say** WHAT I tell you to say. God's call on our life is essentially the same as Jeremiah's. God has already given us WHAT we are to say: The GOSPEL (The Good News that Jesus has come and died to save us from our sins. Then was resurrected from the dead to have power and authority over sin and death. Jesus offers us the free gift of salvation through faith in Him.) If you need more help with the WHAT, talk to a pastor, your small group leader, or a friend who you know shares Jesus with people regularly. The real question we need to be asking is not the what, it's the who: "WHO is God sending me to?"

When you look at the life of Jesus, it is clear that Jesus knew His purpose. In fact, He states it quite a bit in the gospels (Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John):

*"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save **the lost**"*

- Luke 19:10

*"For I didn't come to call the righteous, but **sinners.**"*

- Matthew 9:13

This was Jesus' mission. Jesus came to preach the kingdom of heaven, seek and save the lost, and die for the sins of the world. Jesus' mission was all about obedience to God. His obedience led Him often to people who were 'lost'. Jesus' life was evidence that he viewed His purpose in people, not tasks or places. The gospels talk about Jesus traveling from town to town, encountering people who needed to hear the Good News of the gospel.

People are our ministry. Not places, not tasks. God might call us to a specific place or task like a new job, new school, new city, etc. However, His intention is always to lead us to impact people for His kingdom. Regardless of where God has placed you, you can know that He wants you to open your eyes to see WHO He is sending you to.

Application:

- 1) Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

- 2) Who is God SENDING you to? Who is someone in your life that is far from Jesus? (If you can't think of someone, ask God to put someone on your heart)

- 3) Pray the BOB prayer over yourself and the person(s) God is sending you to. Pray these 3 things:

Burden- "Burden my heart God. Unsettle my heart that *(person's name)* does not know you and will spend eternity separated from you unless you save them"

Opportunity- "God give me an opportunity and open a door for me to share the Good News with *(person's name)*"

Boldness- "God when the opportunity arises, help me to not be afraid and share the gospel with *(person's name)* with boldness"

Day 6: “GET READY” (Part 1)

Winston Churchill was the prime minister of Great Britain during World War 2. When this brutal war had been going on for 2 years, on October 29, 1941, Churchill gave one of his most famous speeches. The main point of his speech can be captured in one line:

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

- Winston Churchill

God tells Jeremiah something similar in the verses we will be looking at today. The same thing He tells Jeremiah, He is telling you and me right now. Let’s take a look:

Read Jeremiah 1:17-19

In your bible, underline these three commands God gives Jeremiah: 1) Stand up, 2) tell them everything that I have commanded you, and 3) do not be intimidated. To really see the importance of these commands, let’s take a moment to break down each one:

- 1) “Stand up”- means to ‘brace yourself’. This word was used like a commander speaking to his soldiers. It means *prepare for battle!* Jeremiah was going to be faced with many challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge was that the people he was called to preach to were not his biggest fans. In fact, they would put him in prison, slander him, beat him, and even try to kill him. God was telling Jeremiah, this is going to be a BATTLE, so GET READY! STAND UP!

- 2) “Tell them everything I have commanded you”- This one is pretty simple. God reminds Jeremiah of what He commanded him in verse 7: “say what I tell you to say”. God was saying ‘don’t give them your best advice or what you think they want to hear, just tell them what I TELL YOU TO TELL THEM.’ This sounds easy, but the things that God told Jeremiah to say were HARD things that the people NEEDED to hear, but didn’t WANT to hear. There’s a reason that they wanted to kill Jeremiah...
- 3) “Do not be intimidated”- This means to be ‘terrified’ or ‘to panic’. Jeremiah would surely face feelings of discouragement, fear, and at many points he would be tempted to walk away from being obedient to the Lord.

Put yourself in Jeremiah’s shoes for minute. You probably would have some questions after receiving these commands from God. We often times downplay the fact that bible characters were humans just like us. They had doubts, fears, weaknesses, and made A LOT of mistakes. These characters in scripture were far from perfect. However, what God was asking of them was trust and obedience.

The Lord is asking us to trust and obey Him just like Jeremiah. Like soldiers we have to be ready for battle. We can be confident as we stand firm, boldly sharing the message of the King of Kings, without fear. How can we do this, you ask? We will discuss this more in the last devotional, but you can know this: As a follower of Jesus, we are fighting a battle that has already been won! We stand behind a King that has already won the victory. Therefore, fellow brother or sister, I plead with you like Winston Churchill pleaded with his countrymen, *“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never.”*

Application:

- 1) Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

- 2) God told Jeremiah 1) Stand up (prepare for battle), 2) share what God told him to share, and 3) do not be intimidated by opposition. What are the things or pressures in your life that would keep you from doing these same things that God commanded Jeremiah? Write them down.

- 3) Write a short prayer to the Lord, asking Him to help you overcome whatever fear or distraction that is keeping you from trusting & obeying Him.

Day 7: "GET READY" (Part 2)

Read Ephesians 6:10-12

The famous Isaac Newton's 3rd law of motion is: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." This has been proven to be true in the physical world, but I would argue that it also holds truth in the spiritual world. The Bible is very clear that there is a spiritual battle going on all around us. This battle is between the Lord and His armies versus Satan and his armies. The Lord knew this when He was commanding Jeremiah to trust and obey Him:

Read Jeremiah 1:17-19

Read verse 19 one more time: "*They **will** fight against you but **never prevail** over you, **since I am with you** to rescue you.*" God did not say 'they might' or 'if they fight against you'. God said 'they will fight against you.' As we discussed last time, we are in a battle and we have to be ready to stand firm. However, what we have to understand is that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood" like we read in Ephesians 6. This means that we have an enemy, but that enemy is NOT people. The bible is very clear who our spiritual enemy is:

*The one who does what is sinful is of **the devil**, because **the devil** has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*

- 1 John 3:8

*Be alert and of sober mind. **Your enemy the devil** prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

- 1 Peter 5:8

Satan will do anything and everything he can to tear you down. However, when you belong to Jesus, then Satan does not have the last word in your life. The Devil can tempt you, he can turn people against you, he can try to cause fear or doubt in your mind, but he CANNOT defeat Jesus. The Devil is a beaten foe and he knows that his time is running out. Therefore, that makes him a desperate enemy.

A desperate enemy is a dangerous enemy. We can expect a desperate enemy to go down swinging. That is why our world is as twisted as it is: a desperate enemy. We don't have to be afraid though. We have a King who is stronger than sin, death, and Satan. That King has a name: JESUS CHRIST! Jesus has already won the victory when He died on the cross, paid for our sins, and rose from the dead. He is seated in heaven at the right hand of God and one day Jesus is going to come back to claim the final victory.

When God told Jeremiah that people "will fight against you", He also told him "but they will NEVER prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you." Regardless of whatever spiritual attack came his way, Jeremiah could walk in trust and obedience to the Lord. Why? Because he knew that God would be WITH him! The same is true for us today. God does not send us into a battle that He doesn't plan to fight with us. In fact, we can actually take steps of faith toward God knowing that He has already fought the ultimate battle and won.

As this devotional comes to a close, my prayer is that you would be ready to lay your excuses down, go ALL IN with Jesus, and take the "Jeremiah Challenge." If you choose to do this, be aware that you are stepping into a battle. Just like Isaac Newton's 3rd law, when we take radical steps of obedience towards Jesus (action), we can expect our Enemy to launch a counter-attack (opposite reaction). You can also be aware that these worship song lyrics will always remain true in your life:

*I'm fighting a battle You've already won
No matter what comes my way, I will overcome
I don't know what You're doing, but I know what You've done
I'm fighting a battle You've already won*

Application:

- 1) Write what stood out to you from today's reading and devotional. Why did it stand out to you?

- 2) How does Satan tend to attack you in your walk with Jesus? (*examples: lust, discouragement, what people think of you, etc.*) Write out scriptures you can remember to help you fight against his attacks.

- 3) After reading through this devotional, are you ready to take the Jeremiah challenge? If you are, write out your excuses for not going ALL IN with Jesus below. After writing them, put a BIG "X" through them.

NO MORE EXCUSES! GET READY! PREPARE FOR BATTLE! TAKE THE JEREMIAH CHALLENGE!