

I Knew You

August 21, 2022

Psalm 71:1-6

In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

Jeremiah 1:4-10

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” ⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.” ⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”



Over the past weeks we have spent time with Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. Each prophet of God was called by God to speak God’s word.

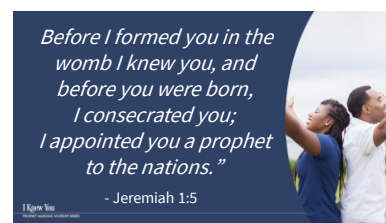
Week in and week out we have been privy to the challenges and difficulty of speaking the word of God to the people of God. For these four, as it is for all who answer the call to speak God's word, at times this job comes with being chased down, ridiculed, abused, excluded, picked on, and, all too often, killed. "Prophet" is not the type of job anyone would willingly sign up for – unless one has a deep and personal connection with God. That is one of the common characteristics that run throughout the stories of the men and women who answered God's call to prophetic ministry. Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah... Deborah, Elijah, Zechariah, Micah... Joshua, Zephaniah, Paul, and, in today's text, Jeremiah.

All were men and women of God. All knew the voice of God when it called them into service. None had any doubt who was speaking to them when they were called. In these ways, God could declare to each, "I Knew You" before I called you. God can say the same to you and to me. As we prepare to walk with Jeremiah through his call story and into ours, please join me in a prayer of blessing...

Turn with me to Jeremiah 1 as we begin this time together. As the passage begins, Jeremiah hears words of assurance and promise from God.

In verse 5 we read, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."* What powerful

words to hear. God knew Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb. God consecrated or dedicated Jeremiah to serve the Lord before he was born. God named or appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. What words of affirmation and encouragement!



How would you feel if you heard God speak these words over you? It would be pretty amazing, wouldn't it? It would be very powerful, wouldn't it?

Well, my friends, God does speak these words over you and over me. And it is not just in this one passage. This theme of being created by God for God's purposes in the world runs throughout the Bible. In Jeremiah 1:5 we are again reminded of these truths. Each of us have been known by God since before we were formed in the womb. Each of us have been tabbed by God to serve the Lord. Each of us have been called to speak God's word to the nations. Just as Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were called by God, make no mistake, you and I are called by God. The question for us, as it has been for everyone who has ever been called is this: what is our response?

I think our response is usually very much like Jeremiah's initially was. In verse 6 he says, *"Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."* When we were young, perhaps this would be our response too. The phrasing may change as we age, but often we try and tell God that we don't know enough, that we can't speak like one should speak if one is truly sent from God. These aren't the only excuses we try either. Sometimes we will try and offer a delaying tactic – God I'll do that when I am more secure, when the kids grow up, when I own my own business, when I retire, when, when, when. We are not unlike Jeremiah in this way.

But check out God's response in the next two verses. In verses 7 and 8 the Lord says to Jeremiah, *"Do not say, 'I am only a boy,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you,*

and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.”The Lord says quit making excuses. God says, when I send you, I am not relying on you to get the job done or to decide on where to go or what to say. God tells Jeremiah that he will go where God decides to send him and that he will speak the words that God gives him to speak. And then God tells him not to be afraid because the Lord will deliver him from his enemies and from all danger.

Now, while these thoughts are comforting and assuring, they are also a bit scary and terrifying, right? It is comforting to know that we do not go alone and that we do not rely on our own power. It is scary to know that we do not go alone or relying on our own power. It is assuring to know that God will guide us, that God will give us words to speak, that God will protect us. It is terrifying to know that God will guide us, that God will give us words to speak, that God will protect us. It is awesome to know that God goes with us. Amazing. It is fantastic that God will support us and give us all we need for the mission. But honestly, it is scary to take that step of faith. It is terrifying to surrender control and all decision-making to God.



Back in the early 2000s God started calling me to more. Step by step God pulled me closer and closer – couples’ group, then men’s group and Promise Keepers, then helping with youth and children’s ministries. I could see myself growing in my faith and in my relationship with God. But in 2010, I really began to hear God’s call upon my life. At that point, I had been a teacher and coach for 23 years. I loved teaching and coaching. I tried ignoring the loudening call. When I couldn’t do that anymore, I tried to tell God that I was happy doing what I was doing, that I was serving God in so many ways.

Well, God's voice just got louder and more frequent. People began to speak into my life, echoing what God was saying to me. Yes, I most definitely felt God's presence and I knew God's assurance that I did not walk alone. But I did not want to surrender. I did not want to fully give God the reigns. When I finally did give my life to the call to pastoral ministry, when I finally vocalized the decision, God flooded me with affirmation. My oldest son simply said, "It's about time." My family and my church embraced me as I made the decision to be used by God in this new way. But it was still plenty scary. The unknowns, the what next, the "where" God might call us – terrifying.

In verses 9 and 10, God knows that Jeremiah is coming close to surrendering to the call. So God seals the deal. In these verses God touches Jeremiah's mouth and says to him, *"Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."* God is staking claim to Jeremiah and his life. Back in 2012, when I finally chose to follow where God led, I did not literally hear these words or even words like them from God. Instead God used many people and even some experiences to let me know that this decision was the right decision, that God was staking claim to my life.

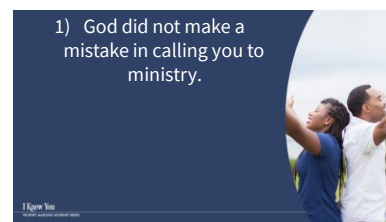
Even though God spoke these words of assurance over Jeremiah, and even though I knew in my heart that I was stepping where God wanted me to step, walking where God calls is not always easy. It can be a struggle. I think it is a struggle because God wants to direct all the steps, not just the ones that lead to Sunday morning in worship. Allowing God to lead, guide, and direct can be a challenge.

It is a challenge because God wants to put all of the words in my mouth, not just the ones that come out when I'm officially "working." God does not just call a part of Jeremiah. God does not just call some of me. God calls for "all" of us.

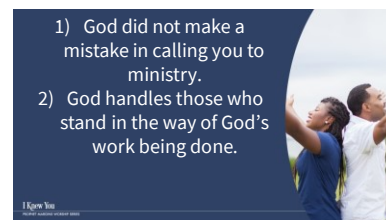
The call is not easy because the words to speak are not easy. Look at the first part of how God tells Jeremiah that he'll be used: *"to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow."* While God never generally sends a prophet when things are going well, these things are still hard to do. Would you like to be tasked with plucking up and pulling down, with destroying and overthrowing? There is a reason that prophets are chased down, ridiculed, abused, excluded, picked on, and, sometimes, killed. But the reality is that by nature we are selfish, and we are sinful. This is why many people do not like to hear the word of God spoken by the prophets. God calls people away from the ways of the world and into the way of surrender and of giving up claims to self. Simply put, this is why faith is so counter-cultural.

In these words we also see that the call is not all doom and gloom, so to speak. God also calls us *"to build and to plant."* While the call to surrender and to follow God with our whole being is not easy, we learn from experience that there is no greater choice or decision to be made. To be able to build and plant, to be a part of transforming lives and neighborhoods and communities, well, there is nothing better. This holy privilege of being called to build and to plant, to walk alongside others as they come to give their lives to Christ and to the building of the kingdom here on earth – it is our highest calling. Yes, ministry in all forms can be hard, challenging, difficult. But to know that we are serving God as God created us to serve, there is nothing better.

To help you understand the call of God and to help you be more comfortable in stepping where God might be calling, you let me share three truths with you today. These truths apply whether you are thirteen or thirty, whether you are forty or eighty. The first is this: God did not make a mistake in calling you to ministry. God planned for us to be ministers to the world. God designed us, made us for this work. We may feel inadequate. We may give God a long list of excuses. But God says, “I knew you” when I called you. God will not give up on us. No matter what our vocation is, no matter what stage we are at in life, no matter what gifts or talents we think we have or don’t have, God has called each of us to be a part of ministering to this broken and hurting world.



The second truth is this: God handles those who stand in the way of God’s work being done. Sometimes the ones standing in the way are other people. It can be tempting to get lost in the weeds – to lose sight of the goal and to become distracted by personal grief, by the attacks, by the criticism and ridicule. But this is not our battle. This is not our responsibility to handle. God will handle it. God is on our side. We must remain true to where God calls us and to what God leads us to say, trusting in God’s care and protection.



Sometimes, though, the one standing in the way is self. The decision to surrender to God and to accept the call to minister in God’s name is not a one-time decision. It is a daily and sometimes more frequent choice.

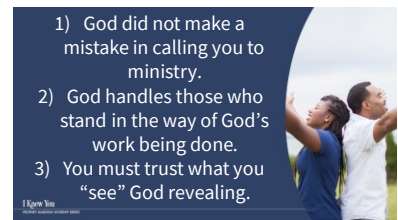
Our own will and the desires of the flesh are always present, always trying to distract and drag us away from God's voice and plans for our lives and ministry.

Whomever is in the way of God's plans, whether self or someone else, the job of the prophet is to stand for and with God, no matter what. It is to stand in conviction that God's voice can shake the foundations of the earth and to remind people to turn from their own evil ways. It can be tempting to listen to the other voices and to our own voice inside our head. God will handle it. Even if the voice is ours!

And third, we must trust what we "see" God revealing. "See" is in quotes because we do not always see with our eyes or just with our eyes. God often asks us what we see. God

asked Amos and he saw a plumb line. In the rest of chapter 1, God asks Jeremiah, and he sees a branch and a boiling pot and figs. Zechariah will see a golden lampstand. For each of these, God brought them something to see. The question for us today is what does God want us to see? What is God revealing to our hearts and eyes?

God helps us to see in a number of ways. Sometimes it is through the gentle nudge or quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is through feeling a warmed heart. Sometimes it is a persistent urge or nag that won't go away. Sometimes it is a person or situation that brings tears to our eyes or hope to our soul. In each of these ways and many more, God, through the Spirit, seeks to make God's will and ways known to each of us. Because God knew us before we were created and because God formed us in the womb and because God anoints each of us to speak the word of God –



in short, because God knows us each intimately and personally, God is always on our side. Our God says, “I knew you” before you were beginning to be. Trust me, says God, you have been in my plans all along.

Earlier in worship we read the first part of Psalm 71. To me, these words are the “what then” to our Jeremiah passage. When we surrender to God’s call on our lives, we need to be reminded that God is always with us. And sometimes, when we are considering God’s call, we need reassurance. In both ways this Psalm offers hope and a vision for our future walk of faith. Hear again and claim these words: *“In you, O LORD, I take refuge... deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me... you are my rock and my fortress... For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.”* God is for us. God is with us. God is present to us.

May we trust what God is bringing to our eyes, to our hearts, to our minds. With that trust, may we be willing to see what God is showing us. That is our call. It requires courage. And with that courage, may we step forward bravely, allowing God to use each of us to further the kingdom here on earth. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. What might God be revealing to you in your life right now? How can being willing to “see” this God thing lead to growth in your faith and witness?
- 2) *Pray*. How has God been moving in your life or faith recently? Pray for eyes to see and for a heart to respond.
- 3) *Study*. Read Jeremiah 1:11-19. Would verses 17-19 be more encouraging or more frightening to you if you were Jeremiah? Do you see how these truths apply to your life today?