

Functioning as a Leader in the Body of Christ

From "I Send You Forth" by Iverna Tompkins

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Transcribed by Jane Vaughn

Don't let this title mislead you. While we usually think of a *leader* as someone with a title, an official position, or even delegated authority from some governing board, a leader is actually someone who others follow. A leader in the Body of Christ sets an example for behavior, makes decisions, takes responsibility, and honestly, seriously cares about the things that are important to God. A leader not only is the one who is visible and stands before a group, but can be one who intercedes on behalf of the obvious front person. The truth is Christians, who are hungry for more of God and are actively moving toward Him, growing in grace and in the knowledge of His ways, are leaders in the Body of Christ. Other people are watching and see that. Positive or negative, a leader is setting an example, a standard for others to reach toward in their own walk with our Lord Jesus.

From the Book of Jeremiah, we can learn a great deal about functioning as a leader in God's Kingdom here on earth. In chapter one, we discover that *God* has a divine plan for each one of His children. In verse 5, we learn something that is specific for Jeremiah in this context, but is equally true for each of us today. *God chose Jeremiah* and *set him apart* before he was born. Likewise, God chose *you* and set you apart before you were born.

Not every child of God is called to hold a *position* as prophet as Jeremiah was. We can see, as he ministered within the framework where God set him, Jeremiah functioned in ways other than exclusively as a prophetic voice. Throughout his 40 years of ministry, functioning primarily as a prophet under the reign of five different kings (vv.2,3), we cannot always separate what he *says* from "preaching." Nor can we separate what Jeremiah says prophetically from "teaching."

What Jeremiah did do consistently was to stay in order. He kept his life clear, clean, pure. He never attempted to follow up his own prophetic words trying to prove their accuracy. His prophetic message simply was, "Thus saith the LORD." "This is the word of the LORD." "Hear the word of the LORD." Jeremiah flowed with the Spirit of God, ministering to kings and kingdoms, cities and people as the LORD led him from one situation to another.

Sometimes, today we are encouraged to discover our "gifts" and "calling," and if we become proficient in a specific type of ministry, *man* tends to label us. "He is a prophet." "She is a teacher." "They are evangelists." That action references the 5-fold ministries found in Ephesians 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher). These *are* divine callings, positions, offices, if you will, and truly are accompanied by a divine anointing – a Holy Spirit unction – to fulfill the responsibilities attendant with that call. Not everyone in the Body of Christ, however, is called to occupy such an office, but we are all called and gifted by the Holy Spirit according to how the Lord wants to use us (1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12).

What we want to acknowledge is that there are times when an individual will flow with an apostolic mantle without realizing that is what it is. That's a good thing, being unaware, so the Holy Spirit may have full reign to accomplish His purposes at that moment. *People* will come and say to that person, "Thou art a ..." and provide a defining label based on that ministry. Then, there will be other times when the same person, under the leading of the same Holy Spirit, will prophesy. Those people will want to label him according to that ministry. We must not allow them to do that to us. I believe it's one of the works of the enemy to try to make us feel, "Well, he's this and she's that and they're the other thing." Too often, we are encouraged to "find your ministry" or "find your place" or "know what you are and define that." We spend too much time trying to determine by "giftings" who we are in the Body of Christ. It is an unnecessary exercise as the One who calls each one will affirm us in His way, and use us as He sees fit in various and differing settings.

The Holy Spirit is the only real gift, and He freely operates as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11). We could understand it like this: If I give you a shirt, that is a “gift.” If I iron that shirt, that is also a “gift.” The first is something to possess (the shirt), and the other is a gift to enhance what is possessed (being ironed). There is clarity added to this concept of Holy Spirit giftings in the scripture if we look at the Greek words. There are two different Greek words with separate meanings. The first (dorea) is found in verses that say, “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; 10:45; 11:17), and refers to the gift that we possess, the Holy Spirit Himself. The other (charisma) is most often found in the plural and translated “gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Rom.12:6; 1Cor.12:4,9,28,30,31; 1Tim.4:14; 2Tim.1:6) and could be likened to our example of an enhancement of *THE* gift.

The Body of Christ is to flow together with the various giftings, callings and diversity of human temperaments as each individual in the Body participates. We are to function as God directs us, moment by moment. Truthfully, every one of us is simply a child of the Most High God, called and chosen by God. He puts His Holy Spirit within and His giftings are according to *His* plan. The least effective members of the Body of Christ are those who put a cap on one gift and declare about themselves, “I am a ...” and avoid or disregard operating in any other calling or ministry.

When scripture says, “desire earnestly the best gift” (1 Cor. 12:31, charisma), it helps us to understand if we add these three words for clarity: “for the occasion.” So, when an occasion arises that demands something be set in order, we want that *momentary* apostolic mantle to be activated. When God desires a mouthpiece, we want to yield to Him to be used *prophetically*. If instruction is called for, God looks for one of us to function as a *teacher* in that moment.

In all circumstances, we need only this assurance: “I know in Whom I have believed, that He is able...” and that’s where to stop (2 Tim.1:12; also, Jude 24; Eph.3:20). “I know He has called me,” period. When we allow others to put us in a box, or we put ourselves in that box, we restrict the spontaneous move of the Holy Spirit. Oh, that we would simply be available to Him for whatever *purpose* He deems necessary for the situation. God has *set us* as His own, with His unction, with His anointing, and He will use us where He wants to – unless we refuse to be used outside the box!

We must know our *purpose* if we are to be effective leaders in the Body of Christ.

1) PURPOSE

There is divine *purpose* behind everything God does, says, or directs. It is important for each of us to discern that purpose, as it will help us in making choices and decisions in every area of life. An effective leader understands his purpose in the plan of God. Jeremiah knew that God’s plan for him included being set over nations and kingdoms (1:10). God told him he was a prophet (v.3) and that He had put His words in Jeremiah’s mouth (v.9). Furthermore, God declared him to be “a defenced city” (v.18).

When we realize God has called *us* and recognize we can trust Him to protect us (“a defenced city”), it is too easy to adopt the attitude that we will be *immune* from problems. God’s word does say that Jeremiah would be *a defenced city*, but that did not exempt him from trouble. In that same context, God warned him to get himself ready to “Stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not be intimidated by them or I will cause you to cower before them. Today, I am the One who has made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land...” (vv.17, 18, Holman Christian Standard Bible)

This is equally as true for us today. One *purpose* God has for the Body of Christ is to take a stand *against* some of the most popular and prevalent positions held by our contemporary world on a diversity of important issues. We cannot compromise, particularly on the basic foundational tenets we have been given in God’s Word. This is not to incite us to rush out and threaten people in the name of prophecy. We’ve seen that done in the church and don’t need to go through that abuse again. However, everything

that is *righteous* stands against what seems to be the acceptable norms of today. Sin runs rampant in *every* circle, in every social strata, in every village, city, and suburb; literally, in every corner of the world. We can no longer dilute or ignore the mandate of God to stand up for what He says is “right.” We dare not sit by silently, especially as our own Christian brothers and sisters try to “explain away” why they are living lives of sinful practices, and then attempt to appeal to our sympathies for understanding, love, and acceptance regardless of the sin. God never intended for sin to continue unchallenged, unchecked, unconfessed, or unchanged.

Paul, preaching at Mars Hill in Athens, addressed a similar situation recorded in Acts 17 (v22ff). Idolatry was a common practice there in Athens, and the Greeks even had an altar dedicated “To the Unknown God,” just so they were not accidentally offending one of them by omission. Paul boldly introduced them to our God, THE Creator of heaven and earth, and in his message he confronted their idolatrous practices, concluding with the following statement. Note that this also could be a message for our nation today.

Acts. 17:30, 31 – “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.” (HCSB)

What Paul was saying is that up until that time, God had allowed a certain amount of *ignorance* about Himself. People (the Gentiles) did not know who He was and this ignorance led them into sinful practices such as idolatry. God has always said, warned, and maintained, that sin would be judged and punished (Rom.2:1-16; Rom.3:23; 6:23; John 3:36). This had been a time of God’s grace extended to allow people to come to the knowledge of who He was (Rom.2:4) and then to serve Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), putting away their idolatrous and sinful practices (Eph. 4:21-5:21; Col.3:1-14). But, Paul adds, that time of grace is coming to a close and the hand of God’s judgment *will* fall on unrighteousness, because God Himself has provided the way of reconciliation through His Son, Jesus, who gave His own life, died, and was resurrected by the power of God so that we could live (John 3:16; 5:24). So today, as in Paul’s day, we cannot and must not ignore His grace and mercy, by rejecting the divine provision made for us – for our salvation, forgiveness, and reconciliation to God. Now is the time we should put away sin from among us, beginning with a candid and honest evaluation of our own individual lives.

God warned Jeremiah that the people of Israel would not like, or accept, the hard message Jeremiah was to proclaim. Verse 19 says, “And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee....” It is true that the ones who find themselves guilty of the unrighteousness, or sin, against which you take a stand in favor of God’s principles, *will* impugn (hold responsible, censure, charge, accuse) your motives. If you take such a strong stand against unrighteousness, they say, “You’re not showing us love. You’re not trying to understand. Ours is a special circumstance that demands unquestioning acceptance. Surely, God wants us to be happy and fulfilled.” Our response should be a sincere, “I DO understand. But sin, according to God’s standard, is sin, period. And your sin will separate you from God” (Isa. 59:2).

We may completely *understand* one’s failure to live according to the Book, but we, as leaders, cannot put a stamp of approval on sin. Sin must not be sanctioned – under any circumstances. And, in the church, we may not take and use their talents, no matter how professional or wonderfully equipped they are. Once sin has been revealed, once it’s been made known, the leadership is responsible and obligated to deal with it! The situation must be confronted and resolved. Jeremiah dealt with a lot of things as he functioned in his God-ordained position over nations and kingdoms.

As Jeremiah was dealing with kingdoms and kings he said, “These people that you rule over, Mr. King, are chosen by God. They have been called to live a certain way, but they are living in opposition to God’s declared plan. God has called, wooed, and warned them, and now, He is going to judge them.” That is the essence of Jeremiah’s messages.

God's heart is to raise up **bold** Christians, and it does take a divinely inspired boldness to stand up for righteousness. We can obtain that unction of boldness as we grow closer and closer to the Lord. Boldness comes by caring about the things God cares about, whether positive or negative. I have prayed for years, "Oh, God. Help me to love what You love, and hate what You hate." That's not a *natural* thing – to hate what God hates. Sin can be very appealing and I can be so accepting at times that I take no definitive stand on anything. That's sadly true. When sincere people say, "Well, I'm trying to quit. I'm trying to..." my *natural* response is, "Oh, I know. Bless your heart."

But when I started praying, or rather, when I allowed the Holy Spirit to start praying through me, "Let me love what You love and give me a divine hatred for what You hate," I began to see a gradual change come within me. And in all honesty, it's not *people* God hates. What He hates is the *other* spirit that is working through their humanity. Truly, He hates the sin, but loves the sinner – a balance we must discover.

A pastor recently reported this situation in his church. They had just been made aware that an unquestionable sin had been hidden in the life of one of his staff members. Now that the sin was out in the open, they didn't know what to do. I gave this counsel: "There isn't even a further decision to be made. The sin has to be dealt with, because if it is not dealt with through real repentance (not just remorse), there is an open door for the enemy to come in and wreak havoc. Be sure of this: the enemy has been patiently waiting for an open opportunity – the devil, as a roaring lion, is out seeking whom he may destroy!" (1 Pet. 5:8). It doesn't matter the nature of the sin, when that behavior becomes ingrained as one's lifestyle, or otherwise influences how choices are made, a door to destruction is opened by that sinner.

The unfortunate thing is that the price for sin is never paid for alone. Inadvertently, the innocent pay a part too, because of their relationships with the sinner. Whole churches can be destroyed or caused to split because of sinful improprieties of the leader(s). Moreover, consider the long-term damage done to whole families because one parent claims to have "fallen out of love," or has given into the devil's trickery through lust. The innocent pay a large price for another's sin!

Too often, when we discover God's *purpose* behind our "call," like Jeremiah, we may want to quit because the road is often rough and lonely. It is not productive to query God asking, "Why did You pick me for this assignment?" Most likely, He is not going to reveal why you were called. *People* will try to help you figure that out, but God wants you to trust Him in your call. What was the *purpose* of God with Jeremiah? He simply needed a mouthpiece. With Jeremiah, God needed someone to go out and declare on His behalf: "I'm not going to put up with this much longer. If you don't repent as a nation, I'm going to bring judgment."

Truthfully, we should be gravely concerned when we read this in Jeremiah 1:16 because of our own nation. Our nation once believed in the one true living God and truly served Him. Things have changed dramatically. And we Christians have stood by lamely saying, "What're you going to do? You can't fight City Hall, you know." It isn't that we are out to fight City Hall. We're not even *fighting* for a principle or for our "rights." It's that we are out to *declare* – in the highways and byways and every place that is in the sphere of our own influence – the righteous nature of our God!

God will not always strive or contend with man (Gen. 6:3ff; Isa. 57:16; Mic.7:18,19). Presently, He is both drawing and convicting, but will not forever. He has been extending His mercy for those who will repent by bringing conviction for our sin. Repentance is much easier while He is contending for our purity and cleansing. When He relents, however, and leaves us to our own devices, we tend to fail to respond to His loving appeal with the right heart attitudes. We have become a stiff-necked generation. As a nation, we have hardened our heart toward God. Therefore, we likely will experience judgment, God's judgment, in the United States of America. We must pray.

I tremble at the thought of our upcoming political scene. And, I pray for mercy and grace for our nation. We don't deserve mercy and grace, but thank God, those gifts are not granted to us based on "deserved" merits. We need to pray for God's mercy and grace – mercy and grace to all countries around the world. "God prolong Your judgment just a little longer. Let us show them Your grace. Let us show them how good You are. Let us show them how easy it *is* to have Your blessing upon a nation. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Psa. 33:12).

Purpose. God will reveal His for each of us as we continue to press in for a greater revelation of and greater intimacy with Him. We can function in the Body of Christ to a certain extent without knowing His purpose for us, but that is like trying to shoot an arrow without a target. You never really know when you make a bull's eye.

2) PERFORMANCE.

Performance demands faithfulness – faithful obedience. The most powerful and effective message we can bring is the one we *live*. "**Preach Christ. Use words if you must.**" Oh, that we would allow the truth of that motto to sink deeply into the center of our beings. We can become quite good at the use of words. We can "wax eloquent" and be fervent in our presentation, skillfully using voice inflections, selecting just the right emotionally packed words, and think that's really going to change lives. The truth is, however, we have to preach Christ just by breathing, by consistently being who we are in Him, by living out who He is in us. People watch others all the time. They learn how to act and react to both positive and negative circumstances by watching how their leaders handle situations similar to their own.

There is something contagious about Christ. We can actually convey to another person a measure of His presence that resides within us through a soft touch on the shoulder, or even through a warm and friendly handshake. When *we* recognize it's Christ in us and not anything of ourselves, **that** is the hope of God – it's God's hope for glory. It's God's hope! Imagine the angels saying, "God, what hope is there for the world to ever know Your glory?" And He says, "It's My people. I have set My glory in them ("Christ in you the hope of glory" Col.1:27). My Son paid the price. As a result, I see them in Jesus and Jesus in them and *that's* the hope of My glory filling the whole earth (Hab.2:14). It's there – in My Bride – in My people – in My Son – in My Kingdom on the earth." What we *say* is very important, but *how we live* is far more influential.

Performance. We are not talking about play-acting or anything that is merely a façade behind which we can hide the "real me." We are talking about allowing a true transformation to take place that comes from the Holy Spirit living within (Rom.12:2). James challenges us to be "doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22). He qualifies the latter as being "deceived by your own selves." Paul says it this way, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal.5:16).

Faithful *performance* of our call. In the section of scripture we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5-7), Jesus lays out in detail how He expects His disciples to live. In this discourse, He addresses matters of our overt actions, our emotions, and our innermost attitudes and motivations. Toward the end of this collection of His instructions, Jesus warns about false prophets and says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16), and again, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (v.20). Can we legitimately extend that and aver that all of us can be *known* by our fruits – our faithful *performance* of all He has called us to do and be? Of course we can, and should.

One of the greatest compliments we can receive while going through difficult times is, "You don't smell like smoke." It would be a deep honor to hear that! "You don't wear it like an outer garment for all to notice and know how hard life's struggles have been." Certainly, we've all been in the fire! Let's allow it to burn off the ropes that bind us. And yes, we can bless God through it all! When we come out of those negative situations, we can apply a little Holy Ghost perfume and allow the people around us to enjoy the powerful aroma of His presence in our presence. We don't have to go through life's hard times

gathering “sympathy cards” from everyone we encounter. What power is in that? We need to get back quickly into the fragrance of the King who called us and promised to go *through it all* with us (Isa.43:1-3; Deut.31:6; Ps.66:12; Ps.91:3). Andre Crouch sings, “Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus, I’ve learned to trust in God.” We should recognize, however, that being in His presence does not make any of us *immune* from **persecution**, and that the hard times we go through with Him beside us are always productive.

Once we know the **purpose** of God and we move into the **performance** of our call with faithfulness, let us learn to walk in the *assurance* of His presence as we, at the same time, may be walking in trepidation through the fiery trials of life. This is the truth: we can be certain that God is leading us, whether or not we can see exactly where we are going at any given moment. It has to do, not with what we *perceive*, but with what we *believe* just because it is found in His Word. Assurance. And we all need to find that assurance in Him.

3) **PERSECUTION.**

Jeremiah 20, verse 2 says, “Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks.” It is interesting to note that Pashur means “freedom.” Here is the chief governor of the Temple, the Priest Pashur, and he put Jeremiah in the stocks. He publicly locked him up and took away his freedom of movement. There will be times in our lives or ministry when people have enough authority – politically or financially or in other ways – to put us in figurative stocks. Stocks are a restrictive device. While fastened in them, both hands and feet are clamped down and movement is impossible.

What can we do when we’re “put in stocks?” We are still God’s people and still have God’s promises, but there’s no place to go or we just can’t get there. That situation certainly tests faith.

A good scriptural example for us would be Paul and Silas. When they were imprisoned, in literal stocks and couldn’t move anything but their mouths, they sang (Acts 16:23-25).

Too often, because of our negative circumstances, or the intensity of *persecution*, we cease to sing. We may even stop praising God for anything. It’s a challenge to praise at all in those difficult times and we may have to begin with clenched teeth. But praise we must, and we will soon discover that as we obedient to praise God in spite of all the negatives, in spite of all the hurt, our hearts will begin to soften, our jaw muscles will relax, and we can truthfully declare, “I DO praise You, Lord. It’s not You that put me here. You’ve allowed it, but oh Lord, the same One that allows me can deliver me. I’ll be here as long as You let me stay here. And yet, I *shall* praise You.”

I have found that sometimes, it’s God who sets you on the shelf, so to speak, because you’ve had so much use. In fact, there’s probably a little tainted thing there in you and He just sets you aside on the shelf. We never seem to understand the timing of such a hiatus because it most often happens in the *midst* of successful ministry. Well, that’s where the people use, over-use, and abuse the ones who serve. It’s where they have come in and picked you up, gotten a drink out of the chosen vessel and you’re just on call – always. Everyone wants you and only you. All of a sudden –PLUNK! You find yourself sitting up on the shelf saying, “What am I doing up here?”

Then the potter walks by and you say, “Hello. I can still hold water! Get me off this shelf! I’ve still ‘got it!’” He just looks at you and nods as He walks by. That wouldn’t be too bad if no one else walked by, but the tongue-waggers walk by too, the critics. “Oh, boy. Talk about a ‘has-been.’ He’s a ‘has-been.’ She’s a ‘has-been.’” “Oh yeah. You know, I remember when they.... You hear all of this but you can’t move! “Why, they used to be... Don’t you wonder what went *wrong*? What happened?” That’s *persecution*.

And there will be *persecution*. Yes, there will be, because **persecution strengthens our walk with God**. “WHEN I CAME TO THE END OF THE ROAD AND FOUND THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT BUT GOD, IT WAS THERE I FOUND THAT GOD WAS ENOUGH.”

Persecution can start in the family. It can start in the church. It can start anywhere. It does not matter – but when the potter picks you up and sets you out of the center of activity, I promise you, His purpose is to do you good, not harm! He knows what He is doing and He knows what you need. This is the same potter that will one day return. He will pick you up and scrape you off again, clean you up and put you back in the kiln because the USEfulness that He knows He can have from you must come through a freshened vessel. And, as long as I’m successful in ministry, I sometimes don’t care how fresh I am personally if what’s inside coming out for others is fresh. If the Word is fresh and people are being renewed and changed, I would just press on, wearing myself out, being discouraged in between messages, and so on. The Lord says, “I love you far more than that. Yes, I could put clean water and oil and wine in you every day. That is not a problem. But you see, I called you as a *chosen* vessel and I want *YOU* to be renewed. I want to get rid of some things that have tainted you.” We must not fight that. Know there is divine *purpose* behind this time of *seeming* uselessness or lack of productivity. And know this also: the workings of God in your life are not *persecution*.

Now, Jeremiah changed Pashur’s name to Magor-missabib (Jeremiah 20:3). Pashur means “freedom.” Magor-missabib means “terror on every side,” or we might say, fear on every side. For those Christians who do not have a mature walk with God, when negatives come, when *persecutions* come, there’s terror on every side.

I surely want to be one who can honestly say, “None of these things move me” (Acts 20:24). The one who said that, Paul, had been beaten, stoned, whipped, left in the water to die and left outside of cities to die, and all the other things (2Cor.11:23-27), and yet he says, “I’ve been through all these things, of course, but none of these things move me. They can’t find anything that moves me.” That’s what he was saying. “They’ve done everything they know to do to me, but they can’t move me.” Move him from what? Away from his God or his *purpose* or his understanding of faithfulness. *Persecution* must not distract us from our cause.

4) PERSISTENCE.

Jeremiah simply continues to prophesy regardless of what man does to deter him. They put him in stocks (Jer.20:2), threw him into a hole (Jer.38:6), and he just looked to the opening and prophesied! Oh, that we could be so *persistent!*

I grew up in “Pentecost” and my father’s call was to “pioneer churches,” we call it today. He would go to a city where there were no churches teaching about the power of the Holy Spirit. My Dad looked around and tried to find a place, like a storefront, that we could afford to rent. Then he would just start preaching, and he always started with only his family. He had 5 kids and our mother and there we were, the six of us. Dad would preach. Little by little the church would grow and little by little that building would fill up. But as soon as we’d get a building decent enough that I could be proud to invite my friends to church, or we’d live in a house that was freshly fixed up by my mother and dad, as soon as things began to look pretty good Dad would move on to the next city. He had fulfilled his call for that place.

As a child, I used to despise all those relocations because we stayed in one place only long enough to establish the church. Dad never had big congregations – 35-50 people – but I can drive through Oregon and see great works of God today that were started by my Dad in storefronts. He was simply faithful. He was *persistent* in his call, a powerful man of God who never received public recognition for all his labors. I have seen many mighty miracles occur because we were usually on the “wrong side of town” where the rent was cheap. And the drunks would stagger in – and walk out sober. One time, I saw a man come in and as he stepped into the aisle he had a pistol in his hand. He boldly said, “You’ve ruined my home!

My wife came here and you have ruined my home. Now, you're going to pay for this." And he raised that thing – I can still remember the feeling of stark terror that pierced through me. My Dad just stood there – "...having done all..." you stand (Eph. 6:13) and he looked at the man. All of a sudden, the man screamed out, "Help! I'm paralyzed!" Oh, yes! "Greater is He that is in you..." (1 John 4:4). What a demonstration of God's power!

My father came down from the pulpit, walked to the man, laid hands on him, and asked the Lord to release him. The gun fell to the floor – just like the man did – and he received Jesus Christ as his own personal Savior. That whole family became active in our church. This is just one of many miraculous times I could relate!

Do you know why I trust this God we serve? I've seen Him in action! And I've seen Him in action through men and women who didn't have big churches; who didn't have fame and recognition because of television broadcasts. They simply kept their places and remained in order (see 1 Chron.12:38). They *persistently* followed and obeyed God.

5) And here's the PARADOX: Jeremiah wanted to quit, but he couldn't.

Listen to him in chapter 20, verse 7: "O, Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was persuaded; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed..." The word *persuaded* is /pathah/ – it means "enticed, deceived in the negative sense, allured, flattered, persuaded." That's what God has done to every one of us who are called. God has *persuaded* us. Remember all the altar calls you have answered? We sang, "I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord, O'er mountain, o'er plain, o'er sea. I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord; I'll be what You want me to be." Of course we responded. The anointing was active there in the altar call! It is powerful to sit under the anointing of God ("thou art stronger than I" v.7).

"Where You lead me, I will follow. Whatever You want from me, Lord, I will do." Then reality sets in, and that is what Jeremiah is saying. In today's vernacular, we would say, "You tricked me, Lord!" Jeremiah continues, "...I am a laughingstock all the time; everyone ridicules me. For whenever I speak, I cry out – I proclaim: Violence and destruction! because the word of the LORD has become for me constant disgrace and derision." (vv.7, 8).

Jeremiah complains that the message God gives him is never encouraging and comforting. It is always "Violence and destruction." The people do not want to hear it, and because God delays His hand of immediate judgment, they laugh at the message and mock Jeremiah. He wants to quit. Apparently Jeremiah struggles and avows not to speak for God, but finds he cannot cap and contain what he hears. He says, "If I say: I won't mention Him or speak any longer in His name, His message becomes a fire burning in my heart, shut up in my bones. I become tired of holding it in, and I cannot prevail." (v.9, HCSB)

My children – my adopted children in the faith – tease about how tough I am on them (like a good mother). But the truth is, "correction" *is* part of my calling. I don't know anyone who honestly likes confrontation – to give it or receive it. There are times I would prefer God give the hard messages to someone else – but He continues to use me in these situations. Sometimes I would like to just "sit on" things I know God has spoken, but like Jeremiah, I cannot. In the past, I envied my brother Judson, who is a true father in the faith – soft-spoken, gentle, holy, doesn't put up with un-holiness, but he has a way of just loving you out of it. If I try to function like my brother, no one listens. It's simply a difference in the call.

You cannot and should not try to be something God has not called you to do or be. You can't be tough if you're not tough, and you can't be gentle if you're not gentle. God will use you like He wants to use you because He knows what will be effective and accomplish what it is He is trying to do. Just be you. Be who God wants you to be. Be who *you* are in God.

6) PURSUIT

Jeremiah is not only opposed and persecuted by his countrymen, they pursue him as enemies. The people do not like the messages Jeremiah delivers because he prophesies fearful realities – that God will bring judgment on the nation for their sins. It does not seem to dawn on them to repent and seek God's forgiveness. Instead, they pursue Jeremiah to carry out their vengeance on him. Verse 10 reads, "for I have heard the gossip of the multitudes, "Terror is on every side! Report him; let's report him!" Everyone I trusted watches for my fall. 'Perhaps he will be deceived so that we might prevail against him and take out vengeance on him.'" (HSCB)

Jeremiah says, "Oh, this pursuit is heavy. Even my friends have turned against me and are out to destroy me." It is awful to be pursued by the enemy, but these are Jeremiah's own people. The Message calls them "familiar friends." What a trial!

Jeremiah faithfully spoke the word of the Lord. And, yes, it was a frightening time as he cried out, "Violence and destruction," but he was fulfilling his divinely stated purpose. He had performed all God prompted him to say and do. He had been persistent and continued to prophecy regardless of the persecution. He had even faced the paradox of wanting to resign yet choosing to respond positively to the power of God within. And now, he is being pursued.

God gives us an answer for our adversaries but he does not encourage us to enter into a verbal battle. It is in the Book of Romans where Paul reminds us of a precious truth. "What shall we then say to these things? (Rom.8:31a). Here's what we say: "If God be for us, who can be against us? (v.31b). "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v.35a). What shall be able to separate us from the love of God which ins in Christ Jesus? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine..." (v.35a). What about being stripped in front of the public? What about "nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (v.35b). Because "as it is written, 'For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter'" (v.36).

But Paul goes on to say that none of these things will be effective against us. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, not things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom.8:37-39). Nothing. Not one calamity or tragedy, regardless of how severe, can separate us from God's love. Does that make us immune from trouble? No.

All his friends-turned-enemies are pursuing Jeremiah, but the Lord encourages him for God is also in pursuit. Jeremiah 20:11: "But the LORD is with me like a violent warrior. Therefore, my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. Since they have not succeeded, they will be utterly shamed, an everlasting humiliation that will never be forgotten." God is in pursuit of Jeremiah, to be there with him as a protector warrior. He is, likewise, in pursuit of Jeremiah's enemies, to keep them from succeeding in their evil plots against His mouthpiece, Jeremiah.

If we look at Psalm 31, for an example, we will see that David, too, was persecuted and pursued by his enemies. In this Psalm, we find David calling out to God for deliverance and, at the same time, speaking of his complete trust in God, and of God's goodness and faithfulness to respond and provide everything he needed. The enemy is in pursuit, but our God is there as a rock and refuge and strength. David knew that and Jeremiah was learning it as well.

In Jeremiah 20, verse 12, we hear Jeremiah call upon God much like David did, to exact His vengeance on his enemies. "LORD of Hosts, testing the righteous and seeing the heart and mind, let me see Your vengeance on them, for I have presented my case to You." (20:12).

Let's not be blind-sided when humans may pursue us. Be aware and watchful, for many in the church believe theirs is a real "cause" to reveal the failings of others. Sometimes it works out like this: If a leader in the church fails or falls (sins) and that failure becomes public knowledge in the congregation or community, regardless of the nature of the fall, there will be people in pursuit. They feel obligated to talk about the problem and even to broadcast whatever it is they think they know. Motivated by a spirit of judging, they have become judgmental in the process. There is not positive reason behind their pursuit, but they believe there is some righteous purpose served in making everyone aware of that leader's failings. They are misdirected.

God is interested in healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation following a time when we have shown poor judgment and made unwise choices resulting in a fall. He has made all the necessary provisions for our forgiveness and restoration (1Jn.1:9; 2Cor.5:18-21) and it is clearly His desire for that restoration to occur. The scripture is also clear that we are not, under any circumstances, to participate in judging another person. We have our hands full just keeping our own lives pure and in order (Mt.7:1-7; Lk.6:37; Rom.14:3,4; Jas.4:11). God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2Cor.5:28b), not of judging.

Being pursued on occasion by people is one thing, but the spirits of darkness are constantly pursuing us as well. Anyone who names the Name of Jesus as his or her own Savior has become a target for the devil, our adversary (1Pet.5:18). The spirits of darkness hate the illumination of light (Jn.3:19-21), and the more brightly we shine, the more we are going to be pursued by them. With that in mind, it is vital we continue to grow in relationship with our God, becoming stronger and stronger in Him (1Pet.5:10), enabled to do all things He calls us to do by His Holy Spirit (Phil.4:13). Shining as a light in dark places, revealing His love for mankind and His plan of salvation, are some of those things God wants us to be willing and able to do (2Cor.4:6; Mt.5:14-16; Phil.2:15).

It is not always an easy thing to do the will of God. Persecution and being pursued by the enemy is something we may face. In spite of all Jeremiah has gone through, he still says, "Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD, for He rescues the life of the needy from the hand of evil people" (Jer.20:13). What a word of hope and encouragement for all of us today!

7) PRAISE

Hear it again: "Sing to the LORD, praise ye the LORD, for He has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evil doers" (Jer.20:13). The Psalms are replete with instructions for, and real-life examples of, giving God praise for Who He is and what He has done on behalf of His people. But also, in times of trouble, we praise before God intervenes in our circumstances (Ps.18:47-49; 27:5,6; 146:2). Night or darkness in the scriptures can represent our times of greatest trouble, and we are to sing songs in the night (Jb.35:10; Ps.42:8; 77:6). "Sing a new song," "Sing with thanksgiving." "Sing unto God our strength." Many are the admonitions to sing.

Praise, prophetic praise, is praise that is founded on the Word of God, not on feelings. Jeremiah had to learn to ignore his feelings, and be directed by what he knew of his God. (Selah!). Paul reminds us that we can accomplish this because of Who it is that lives within us. He says, "But we have this treasure" – that is, Christ – "in earthen vessels" – that is us. So, Christ in us is our enablement. Paul continues, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2Cor.4:7). When we try to draw on some inner strength in our "nighttimes," let's be certain we understand that without the strength of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are nothing and have nothing (Jn.15:5). Then, when we find that inner strength to endure whatever difficult times we go through, it is always his strength operating in and through us, the earthen vessel (see also, 1Pet.1:3-8).

If we go back to 2 Corinthians 4 (see from verse 7 above), Paul goes on with a testimony. He says, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not

forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (verses 8,9). In verse 17 of the same chapter, Paul refers to all these troubles in life as “light afflictions” and reminds us they are “momentary.” Furthermore, he gives us a key in verse 18 for being successful in the ability to praise God in spite of all the negatives of life (HCSB): “So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal,” permanent, unchangeable, reliable. (see also 2Cor.6:3-10; Ps.37:24; Rom.5:3-5).

Affliction brings glory and praises to God only as we look in the Word for His perspective on this life and on eternity. As we learn to agree with God and adopt His viewpoint, we can sing and give thanks to the Lord and understand that ultimately, He is going to bring good out of all of our situations (2Cor.4:17; 1Pet.1:7; Jas.1:2-4). The God who promised is faithful to His promises (Heb.10:23; rom.4:21; Heb.11:11) because his promises represent Himself and God is faithful to Himself. He keeps covenant (Deut.7:9).

If we persist in holding a temporal view of our negatives, it can lead us into another area of life that Jeremiah faced.

8) PITY – SELF-pity

We hear Jeremiah whining in vv.14-18: “why was I born? Why do I have to prophesy doom and gloom to people that don’t want to hear it? Do I have to have this shameful persecution? Why me? Why me??” *Self-pity is a form of pride.* Basically, it says, “I am better than this fate. I ought not to be here.” We can be sure that God resist the proud (1Pet.5:5b), and embraces those who stand humbly before Him (1Pet.5:5c), submitting to His plan in faithful trust (1Pet.5:6). If we think we are getting unfair treatment, maybe we had better go back and re-read our Bibles. Not one “great” in the Bible had an easy life. What they had, and we have, is a God who loves us and is right there ready to walk the path alongside us, making every provision for our success. We have only to plug in to those provisions by walking in obedience to His ways.

In the Book of Hebrews (9 chapters 8-10), we discover that we actually have much more help than the fathers of our faith in Old Testament times. We have Jesus, “the mediator of a better covenant” with “better promises” (Heb.8:6). He is our Messiah and through the sacrifice of His shed blood, offered for our sins, we can come to God with boldness and confidence (not impudence or brashness), knowing He hears and responds to us in great love (1Jn.5:14,15).

Our God is sovereign and he loves His creation. It is His earnest desire that all people everywhere would come to the knowledge of his divine provision of salvation through His Son, Jesus (1Tim.2:4; 1Pet.3:9b). that requires us to accept His plan of salvation as He laid out the requirement and details (Jn.1:12; Rom.10:9,10; Jn.3), and to follow His ways as we live out our days on earth. Ours is not a “blind faith,” for we see clearly Who it is we are following (Jesus) and we choose to model ourselves after His example; we obey His rules and keep His commandments.

We want to know God in intimacy and experience His power in our lives. We want everything that is good about God. And we can have all that, but must pay attention to a few other things as well. Paul has some hard things to say. In Romans 12:1, he admonishes us to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (HCSB) and adds that that was one way to worship God. To our praises, to our songs, can we add this surrender of our self-will to His will as another way to worship Him in spirit and in truth? Can we set aside our self issues so that we can take up His? What things in life are so important that we would allow them to stand between us and full commitment to Christ?

In Philippians 3, Paul recounted a few of the choice positions he enjoyed in life before surrendering himself to Christ. He concluded that even though those were all good things in his old way of thinking, after meeting Jesus in salvation, he “consider(ed) everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value

of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil.3:8). Furthermore, Paul said he wanted to “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of (his) own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ” (vs.9 HCSB). Now there is a stance we could imitate!

The next verse, however, verse 10 (part a), describes what most of us truly desire: “My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection...” but we make an error by usually stopping at that phrase. We want the glorious part of being His. But do we honestly want to know Christ in all His fullness? The rest of verse 10 reads as follows: “and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death.” We want to be intimate with Jesus in His power and glory, but is that equally so when we consider His sufferings – let alone His death?

When we put into proper perspective all that Christ experienced and accomplished for us, all we can truly do is bow in humble adoration and thanksgiving. There is no room for self-pity!

9) PROSECUTION

We usually have a picture in our minds of a legal court setting when we use this word, prosecution. The first definition for prosecute, however, is: “To pursue or persist in so as to complete.” Then, the second says, “To carry on; practice.” After these two follow the legal aspects of the word. (American Heritage Dictionary. 1981.)

In spite of his questioning God, Jeremiah does not allow his feelings to hinder his call. He resumes the prophetic role, hearing and obeying, and speaking out and trusting God. He carries on; he follows up; he prosecutes his call.

How many times do we short-circuit God’s plan, Plan A if you will, by substituting our own Plan B? We don’t like how things are going for us in Plan A – too much hurt, too much pain, too much persecution, too much rejection, too much whatever – and we just give up. We call a halt to what God ordained because of our self issues, or self-pity. We set ourselves aside to a certain extent. We abandon Plan A and initiate plan B. Plan B (ours) doesn’t hurt because we remove ourselves from the fray. We go on living functioning in daily activities, but we call a halt to “ministry.”

If we would be honest today, and evaluate how much time, how much valuable time we wasted in those past detours, we would be amazed. Looking back at these facts is not for the purpose of bringing on shame or regrets. It is so that we can learn from our mistakes and prevent falling for the same trap in the future (see Ps.119:110; 140:5; 119:10,21). The enemy is very cunning. He is clever; he is sly. *He sets traps for us* that he is certain will be effective in eliminating us from ministry (see Eph.4:14). Let’s learn from the past. Beware of self-pity because it will derail the purposes of God until we deal with the issues, repent, and are restored to usefulness.

About Jeremiah, Smith’s Bible dictionary says, “...timid resolve, he was unflinching in execution; as fearless when he had to face the whole world as he was dispirited and prone to murmuring when alone with God.” What we call “prayer!” Two things prayer is NOT. First, prayer is not an opportunity to murmur. Second, it is not giving God unknown information, as if he is blind, deaf, or otherwise unaware of our circumstances.

Now the mercy and grace that I see evident here, in Jeremiah’s call and ministry, is that the Lord continued to speak. Doesn’t that amaze you? The Lord continued to speak, direct, and protect him all the while Jeremiah was still being threatened, belittled, imprisoned, sought after, and then rejected. How could Jeremiah just keep on going? The secret of his tenacity was in his intimacy with and faith in a living God regardless of his circumstances of life.

So, what happened to Jeremiah in the end? There are conflicting historical traditions found in the research literature. In truth, we do not know exactly what happened to him. Was he sawn in half? Was he hung? Did the Jews stone him? It doesn't matter how his life ended or God would have told us. What is important for us to know is that God called him as a young man and said, "I'm calling you. I'm going to put My word in your mouth. I want you to speak it through every negative circumstance, through every bread-and--water experience, through every chain-experience, through every cistern-experience, through every dungeon-experience, and when you're pulled out of there and set back on your feet, I want you to continue to speak my word. I'm not changing it. You'll just go on and on and on. And thank you so much, Jeremiah."

We can be confident of this – he was graduated at the end of his course – not a day early, and not a day late. Such is true for us today as well. When God's purposes are fulfilled in our lives, it's as if He says, "Okay. Time's up. Come on home." Until that time, we continue on, being led by His Spirit, walking in obedience to His direction in life and in ministry. Once we have experienced that fire in our bones, like Paul, our response is, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!" (1Cor.9:16).

And so I challenge you every way I know how – become a bold leader and understand, there may be some little pebbles on the road and difficult things to overcome in life, but it's not going to kill you, even though you may wish it would. You're just going to get right back up and move boldly in the Word of the Lord. And we're eventually going to see, "Thy Kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth, in the same way it is in heaven!!"