

God Equipping You to Lead

By Chris Shirley

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Use an Internet search to find at least four interesting facts about Jeremiah's ministry in Judah. (Example: Jeremiah was known as the "weeping prophet" because of his emotional response to the sin and decay in his nation.) Two reliable sources for this information are Constable's Bible Study Notes (www.soniclight.com) or the Holman Bible Dictionary (www.studydrive.org). Prepare to share the four interesting facts.

Assignment Two

Read Jeremiah 1:1–10 and Exodus 3. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How were the call experiences of Jeremiah and Moses similar? How were they different?

Assignment Three

Read Isaiah 6:1–7 and Ezekiel 3:1–3. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: How do these passages compare with Jeremiah 1:9–10 related to God's equipping of His leaders? What is unique and what is similar in the three callings?

Scripture to Memorize

"But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.'" Jeremiah 1:7

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will acknowledge that when God calls men and women of all ages to lead, He also provides them with everything necessary to accomplish His will.

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Chris is a frequent conference speaker in family ministry, men's discipleship, adult education, and teacher training. In addition, he has written youth and adult Sunday school curriculum and Bible book studies for LifeWay Christian Resources. His article on comprehensive discipleship in the local church, "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple," was published in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*.

Chris and his wife, Isabel, have been married for over thirty years and have two adult children, Andrew and Haylee, and (so far) one grandchild.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

When you hear the word *leader*, what image comes to mind? Do you immediately think of a parent, teacher, pastor, coach, or discipler? Do you think first of adults, or does your image include members of your discipleship group, a sports team captain, or a friend from school. Do you consider yourself a leader?

Scripture is clear that God chooses leaders from every stage of life. Your age and possible lack of experience do not disqualify you. As you read the passage from Jeremiah, imagine how you would react if God called you today to be a leader for Him.

Read Jeremiah 1:4–10 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verses 4–5. The prophet Jeremiah grew up in the home of a priest, Hilkiyah, a direct descendant of Eli. Jeremiah may have expected to follow in his father's footsteps and serve in the temple at Jerusalem. But God had other plans. Jeremiah was barely twenty years old when God called him to be a prophet to the people in the kingdom of Judah. The young prophet began his story by describing his call. That call came in an amazing encounter with the Yahweh, the eternal God of all creation. Verse 5 presents three important truths about Jeremiah's call to be God's leader.

1. *Jeremiah was born to serve the Lord.* God spoke directly to Jeremiah and revealed that this call was planned before Jeremiah was **in the womb**. Before he drew his first breath, Jeremiah's future was planned.
2. *God had a mission for Jeremiah.* To be **consecrated** means to be set apart or dedicated for a special purpose. Even before he spoke his first word, this young man was destined to one day speak for God.
3. *Jeremiah's ministry would transform the world.* God was not simply calling Jeremiah to a ministry in Jerusalem. God's plans were much bigger. He called Jeremiah to be a **prophet to the nations**.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share several facts about Jeremiah.

Studying the Passage

Verses 6. I am only a youth. One of the first obstacles Jeremiah had to overcome was his lack of confidence. After all, he was barely out of his teenage years in a society that honored the wisdom that came with age. Although Jewish society in Jeremiah's day did not recognize an adolescent life stage, men from thirteen to thirty were still in preparation for full adulthood. Jeremiah considered himself too young to be respected as a leader. **I do not know how to speak.** Jeremiah's lack of training and experience in preaching convinced him that no one would listen to a prophet so young. God's response to Jeremiah's insecurity sounded like a replay of the Lord's conversation with Moses from centuries earlier (Exodus 3).

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the comparison between God's conversations with Jeremiah and Moses.

Studying the Passage

Verse 7. Do not say, “I am only a youth.” Notice that God directed Jeremiah’s attention away from what he could not do and focused Jeremiah on what God would do through him. Specifically, God would direct Jeremiah’s schedule (**to whom I send you**), supply him with a message to deliver (**whatever I command . . . you shall speak**), and protect him from harm (**v. 8. I am with you to deliver you**).

On Your Own

Imagine God calls you to stand before your church next Sunday morning and deliver a critical message to your church family. In the columns below, list the excuses you might give God for *not* accepting His call. In the second column, write what you think God’s response to you would be for each excuse.

God, I Can’t Do That Because...

Child, You Can Do This Because...

Studying the Passage

Verse 9. the LORD . . . touched my mouth. This was an amazing exchange between the Lord and His prophet as God reached out and touched Jeremiah’s mouth. As a prophet, Jeremiah’s ministry would consist primarily of words, God’s words. **I have put My words in your mouth.** Not only did God call Jeremiah to be His leader in Judah, but He also equipped His young prophet with the tools to accomplish the task. Despite his young age, in spite of his inexperience, and regardless of his excuses, Jeremiah was now a leader and a prophet in Judah. God had taken an unskilled and insecure young man and had transformed his life.

On Your Own

In what area of your walk with Christ do you feel least equipped to be a leader (teaching or discipling others, prayer, witnessing, knowing Scripture, fruit of the Spirit, etc.)? In the space below, write a short prayer to God, asking for His power in this area.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on the findings from Isaiah 6:6–7 and Ezekiel 3:1–3.

Studying the Passage

Verse 10. nations . . . kingdoms. Once again God reminded Jeremiah about the broad scope of his ministry influence. Verse 10 describes his message as difficult (**pluck up . . . break down**), painful (**destroy . . . overthrow**), and yet purifying (**build . . . plant**). The young prophet would serve God at a difficult time in Judah’s history. He warned the nation of God’s judgment but, at the same time, offered words of comfort and God’s promise of salvation. Jeremiah watched sadly as his family and friends were taken away as captives to Babylon. Near the end of his life, Jeremiah joined another group of exiles as they were sent to Egypt. Yet, in the end, God’s promise to Jeremiah was fulfilled. His prophecy of a “new covenant”- one

that transformed the world - introduced the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

On Your Own

Consider the way God has worked in your life up to this time. What type of leadership role do you think He might be preparing you to fill? How is He equipping you? Write your thoughts in the space below.

Share your thoughts during the “Heart and Hands” period. Ask the other disciples to pray that you would clearly hear God’s call.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Whomever God calls, whenever God calls, He equips His leaders with the necessary gifts, skills, and characteristics to accomplish His will. Jeremiah was young and untrained, yet he was God's choice to provide spiritual leadership to Judah during the years before the exile.

In Jeremiah 1:4–5, Jeremiah heard the voice of God calling him to a difficult ministry position. God had determined to call Jeremiah before His birth. He looked through the hallways of time and selected this son of a priest to declare His message to Judah and the world.

As God's child, and a follower of His Son, you are a part of God's plan for this world. He knew you before you were born and has (1) called you to a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, and (2) called you to accept a role in advancing His kingdom.

Jeremiah 1:6–8 records Jeremiah's hesitation to accept His call because of his age and lack of experience. The Lord reminded Jeremiah, however, that this ministry was not about him. God would provide the young prophet with everything he needed to accomplish the mission.

The Lord is not interested in hearing about your lack of qualifications. His ministry is not about your expertise. God only needs a humble servant who is willing to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Jeremiah 1:9–10, God transferred His words into Jeremiah's mind and heart. From this point forward, he would be God's "mouthpiece" to Judah. This would all be part of the fulfillment of God's plan through Jesus Christ.

God's Spirit is the source of your giftedness for ministry. When He calls you to lead, He will instill within you every resource you need to do what He has called you to do.

Follow up Question

What can I do to support your effort to become the leader God is calling you to be? How can I pray for you as you listen to God's call?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.