

LifeGroup

Date: July 9, 2023

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13; Matthew 10:24-39

Theme: Alignment...with the God of
Our Witness

Belong Have you ever felt so passionate about something that you just couldn't keep it in and had to tell people only to find that they really didn't understand? We've all had times in our lives when we've wanted to share the things we felt deep inside only to find things were different from what others felt or thought. We could be teased or ridiculed by the people closest to us in order to "get back in line" but somehow we knew that wasn't the right thing to do. Our choices at those times are either to just give in to the pressure and go along with everyone else or push back and hold our ground knowing that it may cost even more ridicule or maybe even a relationship.

This week's texts focus on the passions God has placed deep within us and the difficulty we may face as we share those passions with others. Jesus knows that everyone will not be willing to hear our words and may even push back with skepticism or even hostility. It's in those times where he encourages us not to be afraid. Even though we may face difficult and uncomfortable situations, it's in our journey with him where we will find life.

Prayer... Heavenly Father, we long to share about our relationship with you with others so that they may also come to know you but we talk ourselves out of it because we are afraid of the consequences. Guide and help us find the courage to see beyond the difficulties and trust your work through us. Amen.

Believe Read Jeremiah 20:7-13. Jeremiah was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah and his ministry spanned the last forty years of Judah's existence which ended around the year 587 B.C. This was a very tumultuous time with a great deal of internal strife as Judah slid toward destruction. This text opens with Jeremiah complaining to God that it seems every time he speaks what God tells him, he is ridiculed and mocked. Jeremiah's prophetic message was one of confronting people about their sins and destruction of the southern kingdom, so one can understand why people might be a bit upset with him.

• *Have you ever felt God was asking you to do something that would be uncomfortable? Have you ever felt like complaining to God?*

Jeremiah seems to be caught between facing a great deal of anger thrown at him and the deep passion God has placed within him to speak God's word. In the end, Jeremiah finds the courage to speak despite the consequences of facing ridicule and anger, knowing he has to follow the passions God placed deep within him.

• *Have you ever found yourself teased for stating your belief? What was your reaction?*

Read Matthew 10:24-39. This text from Matthew starts out with Jesus reassuring his disciples that though they will face persecution, they will not face more than he has and that those who will bring harm to them can only take their life but cannot destroy their soul. Jesus tells them of God's great love for them and that they don't need to be afraid of what they may face.

• *Does knowing God's deep love for you give you confidence to face difficult situations?*

Jesus says that he has come not to bring peace but to turn man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, seemingly to say that his purpose is to divide people by setting them against each other. This seems to contradict his commandment to us to love others. Knowing the ridicule, mocking, and hatred he's experienced, he knows that as his disciples start to share the good news they will also face difficult situations. Jesus isn't encouraging his disciples to initiate division but understands that the result of sharing his message with others will bring a certain level of resistance even within their own families.

• *Have you experienced hostility when you've shared your faith? How did you respond? How do you think Jesus wants us to respond?*

In these passages, Jesus is saying that as we allow our lives to be transformed through him, we very well may face resistance from our families and friends but the life-giving transformation is the beginning of a life that will allow us to connect to the deep passions God has placed within us. Those passions will drive us to interact with the world around us with love and compassion, allowing our relationships to grow deeper with the people in our lives.

• *What does Jesus mean when he says, "to find your life you must lose it"? What does it mean to take up your cross?*

Become As we move into a deeper relationship with God, we find ourselves wanting to share what we have experienced and long to help others connect with God. This can be a dangerous proposition since not everyone will understand or even want to hear what we have to say or may question our motives when we reach out to them with compassion. There may be times when we become discouraged when people, maybe friends or family, put up road-blocks or push us away when we try sharing the good news with them. Jesus reassures that even though we may face difficult situations when we take actions in his name, it's in those very actions motivated from the passions God has placed within us that we find purpose and meaning or, in other words, life.

Prayer... Lord God, we are so thankful for the passions you've placed within us and long to share them with others so that they may come to know you. We trust you and give ourselves to you so that you may work through us knowing that we will face difficult situations but also knowing that it's in that very giving of ourselves where we find life. Amen.

Devotionals: Daily Walk on the Rock

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Day 1: Monday —Redeemed at Great Cost and Called to Discipleship

Meditate on the cost of our redemption as you read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Peter 1:18-19. Jesus gave his life that we might have abundant life, today and forever. But do we misunderstand what this means? Do we look for easy lives and temporal blessings, or do we count the cost of true discipleship as joy (*James 1:2*)? Ponder Jesus' words in John 15:9-13, 18-21, and reflect on martyred missionary Jim Elliot's 1949 journal entry: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." In prayer, offer Jesus your heart and your life.

Day 2: Tuesday —What Has Your Faith and Your Witness Cost You?

God's prophets spoke God's message to God's people. As you read Jeremiah 1:1-19, consider God's call on Jeremiah's life and God's promises to Jeremiah; notice especially the assurances in 1:8, 18-19 and empowerment in 1:9. What is the message Jeremiah must take to the people, and what is their response (*1:14-16; 18:1-12, 18; 20:1-2*)? God promises to be with Jeremiah and rescue/deliver him, but God does not tell him that life as God's servant and spokesman will be without great cost. In what ways does God deliver (*Daniel 3:16-18; Matthew 10:39 add insight*)? What has your faith and witness cost you? Pray you will trust God's heart and promises.

Day 3: Wednesday —Being Honest with God

Listen to God's heart for the people as you read Jeremiah 2:11-13; 6:16; 23:3-6; 24:7. But because the people's hearts are hard and unresponsive to God's love (*see also Romans 2:4*), Jeremiah pronounces impending judgment. God, with relentless love, will pursue the people with drastic measures. In all this, God's messenger suffers physical and verbal abuse, estrangement from the people he loves, and more. In Jeremiah 20:7-13, the prophet pours out his heart, telling God just how he feels. Do you think God can handle this kind of honesty? What evidences do you see of Jeremiah's faithfulness to God's call on his life? Be totally honest with God as you pray.

Day 4: Thursday —A Fire that Cannot Be Quenched

Do you have a passion for sharing God's Word? Is your love for God so great that you cannot help but testify to God's amazing love and saving grace? Have you so embraced who God is and

what God does that it's like you have a fire burning in your soul that must be released? Read Isaiah 55:10-11; Jeremiah 20:9; Acts 5:17-42; Romans 10:8-10, 14-15; and Revelation 12:11. Did you notice the promises about the fruitfulness of God's words; Jeremiah's inability to refrain from sharing God's message; and the early disciples' willingness to suffer for the sheer joy of telling others about Jesus? Pray the Spirit will fill your heart with the passion to share Jesus.

Day 5: Friday —Do Not Be Afraid!

In Jeremiah 20:7-13, we saw the prophet move from lament to praise; if we read on, we would again find Jeremiah in the depths of despair. Sometimes life is like that for us too, but God tells us, as he did the prophet (*1:8,17*), not to be afraid. In Matthew 10, Jesus is preparing the disciples for ministry; he has given them authority to preach and heal in his name, and he tells them not to be afraid. Notice how often this message is repeated as you read Matthew 10:24-39. Will their lives be easy? What might be the cost of discipleship? Who must hold first place in our lives? Ask the Spirit to teach you what Jesus is saying to you personally in this text.

Day 6: Saturday —Alignment with the God of our Witness

Read Matthew 10:24-37. What words of comfort and tender love do you find in the text? What words challenge you? How might the Gospel divide a family? Pray for families that are divided because of belief or unbelief. Rejoice in the wonder of the promise of 10:32; read Acts 7:54-60 to see this promise realized in Stephen's life. How can giving our lives to and for Jesus be the truest self-fulfillment? Is this what it means to be aligned with the God to whom we witness? In prayer, ask Jesus to mold your heart and use your life as a witness to his love.

Day 7: Sunday —The Greatest Reward Read Genesis 15:1. What reward does God offer Abram (*Abra-ham*)? Have you considered that God offers us himself as our greatest treasure? How is God's promise to Abram similar to God's promise to Jeremiah (*1:8,19*)? Consider also the promises given in Deuteronomy 31:6,8 and Joshua 1:5b-6,9. Meditate on the promise of Deuteronomy 33:27a (*RSV*): "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." In John 15, Jesus describes this dwelling as abiding in him. Read Matthew 10:39 with Jim Elliot's words (*Day 1*). How do these thoughts relate to God's promise to Abram? Run to God; pray God will be your greatest treasure.