

How to Keep Going When You Feel Like Giving Up

Texts: Jeremiah 1, 20, and 32

General Direction

To study the tenacity of the prophet Jeremiah in carrying out his forty-year ministry in the direst of circumstances. [Deliver this message after the reading for Week 8 is completed.]

Back Story

Important to an understanding of this time in Israel's history is the reality of the broken covenant. At Mt. Sinai, The Lord declares that he will be Israel's God and they will be his people. There is a covenant relationship which required turning from other gods and following the way of the Lord, set down in the law. By the time we get to Jeremiah, things have fallen apart. Generations of idol worship and defying God's law have reached their apex during the reign of King Manasseh who...

"did evil in the eyes of the Lord following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites... moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end..." 1 Kings 21:2, 16

Jeremiah begins his prophetic ministry shortly after Manasseh's reign. In Jeremiah 2:5 we find this accusation:

"This is what the Lord says: What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves."

God was persistent in pursuing, and the people were persistent in their rebellion. After sending prophet after prophet to correct the direction of his people, Jeremiah is sent to prophesy total destruction at the hands of the Babylonian army.

Sermon Purpose and Outline

Jeremiah prophesies for over forty years under the most difficult circumstances. During his prophetic ministry he is beaten, arrested, imprisoned, and suspended in a muddy pit. Yet he continues to faithfully prophesy. Jeremiah is an example of resilience: the refusal to give up when things get difficult. As we explore Jeremiah's ministry, we will discover how to remain faithful over the long haul.

Sermon Question: How do you keep going when you feel like giving up?

1. Revisit your calling Jeremiah 1:4-8
2. Respond honestly Jeremiah 20:7-18
3. Do not give up Jeremiah 1:17-19

Sermon Introduction

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people complete marathons. The official distance of the marathon is 26.2 miles. Some of the runners are elite competitors, but many are simply trying to run the distance no matter how long it takes. For some, it is a major life achievement just to finish. For all those who participate, completing a marathon requires perseverance through pain.

Creative Teaching Tools

Show pictures of people crossing the finish line at a marathon. Look for pictures of people who are not the elite runners, but ordinary people who obviously suffered to make it this distance. OR, show *Team Hoyt*, a video about a father who runs marathons and ironman races with his 44-year-old cerebral palsied son strapped to his special racing chair.

See the full 10-minute news feature on the Hoyts:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIRvsO8m_KI

Preview and purchase a 4-minute video feature on the Hoyts:

<http://www.simplyyouthministry.com/resources-media---la-cart-together--team-hoyt-.html>

Perseverance is a necessary quality, not only for completing a long distance race, but also for our most significant accomplishments in life.

- Most marriages encounter extremely difficult passages, where either the husband or wife feels like throwing in the towel. When our marriages are struggling, how do we find the power to keep moving forward?
- Every church has its highs and lows. There are times when serving is an utter joy, and others when ministering to the needs of people is exhausting or demoralizing. How do we continue to serve faithfully when we feel like giving up?
- How about trying to pull out of the effects of a series of poor financial decisions? That can take a long time of instilling new habits and practicing increased self-discipline. How do we keep going when we feel like reverting back to our old ways?

It is not uncommon to find ourselves in difficult times where we want to quit. We find ourselves worn down by the task, discouraged, weary, or even exhausted. Where do we turn for strength and motivation when we feel like giving up?

The journey of faith is not an easy path. At times we will become tired and discouraged. Thankfully, the scriptures give us examples of men and women who refused to give up as they followed God. Today, from the life of Jeremiah, we gain insight into how to keep moving forward, when we feel like giving up in our journey of faith.

Jeremiah's ministry covered over forty years, and he remained faithful even though ignored, mocked, threatened, and beaten. He is a model of resilience. As we follow the journey of Jeremiah, we will discover keys to persevering in the faith journey to which God has called us.

Sermon Question: What do you do when you feel like giving up?

1) Revisit your calling Jeremiah 1:4-8

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

Textual Explanation

In this opening passage, God assures Jeremiah that he knows him intimately, and he formed him for the specific calling of being a prophet. Jeremiah, probably knowing what an incredibly difficult, complex and chaotic role that of a prophet was in those days, says tremblingly, *I do not know how to speak, I am only a child* (1:6). The Lord's response is: *Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you* (1:8). God's presence solves everything!

Throughout Jeremiah's ministry, when things got difficult, he would need to revisit his calling, remembering that God had promised to be with him.

Timeless Principal

Our callings will undoubtedly be different from that of Jeremiah, but it is critical, when facing adversity, to recall that God has called us to a given role.

A calling is an idea that redirects the energy of your life. A true calling will change your priorities and activities, causing you to organize your life around something new.

Whether it is a calling as a faithful spouse, a generous giver, a mentor of teens, a devoted Bible teacher, a loyal employee, or a Christ-centered business owner, when God calls us, he intends to be with us guide us and empower us.

Note the powerful words spoken to Jeremiah reminding him of God's abiding presence: *I will be with you*. (1:8) If internalized, these words can give you strength when you feel like giving up.

- *He's with me... even in the complexity*
- *He's with me... even in the chaos*
- *He's with me... even in the confusion*

God may call you to a difficult path, but he promises that you will not be alone; he will give you all of his strength and his presence that you need to persevere.

Cross References

There are some powerful reassurances of God's presence in His word. As Joshua is called to lead the people of Israel after the death of Moses, he is reminded of the Lord's presence.

Joshua 1:5

*"No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; **I will never leave you nor forsake you.**"*

In Psalm 23, David refuses to live in fear because of the guiding and protecting presence of God

Psalms 23:4

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, **for you are with me**; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

After the resurrection, when Jesus is commissioning his disciples he reminds them:

Matthew 28:20

*"And surely **I am with you always**, to the very end of the age."*

When you feel like giving up, revisit your calling, and remember that he is with you.

2) Respond honestly Jeremiah 20:7-18

Textual Explanation

Jeremiah 19 is a shattering story...literally. Jeremiah is commanded to purchase a clay pot, and take it to the elders in the valley of Ben Hinnom, where he will deliver a prophecy against the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah dashes the clay pot on the rocks, breaking it to pieces, pronouncing that in the same way the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed. The very site where Jeremiah gives the speech and breaks the jar is where child sacrifices were performed.

Jeremiah then goes back into the city and delivers the same message in the temple area. There, the chief officer of the temple has Jeremiah beaten up and placed in stocks, where he will remain. The prayer Jeremiah utters in Jeremiah 20:7-18 is one of the most raw prayers in the Bible. He holds nothing back, pouring out his dismay to God. Here is a sampling from the prayer:

"God, you deceived me
I am getting ridiculed all day long"

20:8 God's words I speak out have brought me nothing but insult and reproach
20:13ff I wish I had never been born

Cross References

Honest prayers spoken out of emotional upheaval occur several times in the Bible. Consider the following prayers.

In utter distress, trying to faithfully lead the disobedient people of Israel through the desert, Moses prays:

Numbers 11:15

*"If this is how you are going to treat me, **put me to death right now...** and do not let me face my own ruin"*

Elijah, when utterly exhausted prays: I

Kings 19:4

*"I have had enough, Lord. **Take my life**; I am no better than my ancestors."*

King David bemoans the fact that God seems distant and ignores his plight: Psalms 22:1-2

*"My God, my God, **why have you forsaken me?** Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer."*

Note that these three prayers are spoken by Moses, Elijah and David, who are not exactly spiritual lightweights! Rather than indicating a spiritual deficiency, these prayers appear to be a sign of spiritual health.

Timeless Principal

God desires to hear our honest prayers, even when they are messy and a bit raw. Note that Jeremiah is opening a conversation with God. He is not simply complaining about life or venting, but pouring out his disappointment to God.

God's shoulders are large enough to bear this honest gush of disappointment.

Where are you currently most discouraged in life? Do you feel like you have been faithfully following God, only to experience pain and disillusionment?

Let me ask you to do something. Within 48 hours, find a space where you have at least an hour to meet with God. Simply pray your disappointment to God, or better, write it out. Just begin telling him all you are feeling and experiencing, every disappointment and unmet expectation. Open up a conversation with God about all that is happening. Then, when you are done, wait in silence. God may choose to meet you in this moment. Perhaps he will remind you that he is with you. Perhaps he will instill in you a strong sense of his wisdom and strength. I don't know what will happen in this silence, but I bet the Lord desires to meet with you as much as you need to meet with him.

Jeremiah serves faithfully for forty years. Though he experienced discouragement and pain, he never abandoned his calling, he never gave up. In part, I believe this was because of his utter honesty with God. When you feel like giving up, respond honestly.

3) Remember God's faithfulness Jeremiah 32

Textual Explanation

In Jeremiah 32, Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonian army. It is clear that the city will be destroyed, the land laid waste, and the survivors deported. Strangely, God commands Jeremiah to buy a field. Jeremiah obediently purchases the field, but expresses his confusion over why he is buying property that will never be enjoyed. This is not exactly what one might call a good investment. Jeremiah's prayer concerning his purchase of the field betrays confusion and frustration.

The Lord responds by reminding Jeremiah of his faithfulness. The Lord promises to remain faithful to his people even though he is now sending punishment and destruction. The purchase of the field is an object lesson – a visual way of expressing that the people will not be utterly abandoned, but someday restored to the land. God will be faithful to his promises.

Jeremiah 32:42-44

"This is what the Lord says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them. Once more fields will be bought in this land... because I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord. "

Embedded in the Lord's reply to Jeremiah is a riveting question: *"I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"* (32:27)

This is a phenomenal verse to recall when we feel like giving up. Receive these words today.

- For parents who have been praying for their children for years: *Is anything too hard for me?*
- For work situations that are difficult and discouraging: *Is anything too hard for me?*
- For couples who deeply desire to put their marriage back together but feel discouraged by the work ahead: *Is anything too hard for me?*

Cross Reference

Jeremiah will speak of God's faithfulness in Lamentations
Lamentations 3:21-24

*"Yet this I call to mind and therefore **I have hope**: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for **his compassions never fail**. They are new every morning; **great is your faithfulness**. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore **I will wait for him**."*

Application

When you feel like giving up, remember God's faithfulness. You could do this in much the same way as the Israelites did, by creating "stones of remembrance." Write the major acts of God in your life on rocks, or bricks, or tiles, and place them where they will remind you of the ways God has taken care of you in the past, so that your faith in God for the future is strengthened.

Closing

In the scriptures, the journey of faith is often likened to a race. We quickly discover, however, that our race is more like a marathon than a sprint, where we can be weighed down by pain, discouragement, and frustration.

The writer of Hebrews spoke these words of encouragement in Hebrews 12:2:

*"Let us lay aside the weight and the sin that so easily besets us and **run with patience, the race that is set before us**."*

In the journey of faith, we will grow tired and discouraged. Like Jeremiah, we will receive encouragement to continue in the race when we revisit our calling, respond honestly, and remember God's faithfulness.