

### **“A Prophet’s Call”**

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Each one of the prophets and each person has to open that door and step through. I was reminded in a book by John Ortberg entitled, “All the Places to Go,” and he describes a passage from the book of Revelation 3:8. It says, “Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.” And Ortberg begins to talk about what that means for each one of us as Christians — and it began with the prophets — and even before that, all the way back to the beginning of time. God had a plan and he reminds us that each one of the people who took the time to listen, to respond, and not give in to their own reasons why they couldn’t do it, began to listen for God for why they could.

He said, “Open Door People” are ready or not. He said most of them are not. Just like Jeremiah who said, “I am too young, and I can’t speak well enough.” Well, look at Moses. He came up with his examples and Ruth came up hers, Esther had her examples of why she was not able to. Abraham, he was too old; the same time that Jeremiah was too young.

We are all too “something.” Look at Jonah. Jonah gave us so many excuses and would not listen, [so] that God had to toss him overboard, have him swallowed up by a big ol’ fish, and only then when he finally said, “This is worse than doing what God asked,” [Laughter.] did they finally spit him out and say, “Alright. Go do it.” That is the open door.

Sometimes we go through it willingly and other times we are kicked through it; but one way or the other, we are going to do what God says, or God is going to make it difficult for us.

Sometimes I want to say to some people, when their lives are just in a turmoil, “Hey, is it God just saying, ‘I’m going to keep pestering you until you start doing what I’m calling you to do.’ If you would stop long enough to pray. If you would sit still and listen, God would make it a lot calmer — not unlike Jonah. What he is asking you to do may be tough, but God can make it a whole lot tougher when we are not listening.” So, ready or not, here God comes.

And the next one: Open Door People, are unhindered by uncertainty.

We are all wondering: Am I doing the right thing? Is God asking the right person? Are we in the place at the right time?

And God said to Jeremiah, “I knew you before you were in the womb and I consecrated you before you were born. You don’t have to worry. And, I’m not putting up with your excuses because, Jeremiah, I have been nurturing you before day one. I’m not getting it mixed up and I know exactly what I am doing.”

So when he says to each one of you, when he called you by name, “I have a plan for you and I am going to give you the tools to do it. I’m going to make sure I have done everything I can to provide for you.” Yet, so many of us just give up. We are unwilling to walk through that door, because we just don’t trust God enough, and our lives are full of frustration.

Ortberg continues, “Open Door People are blessed to bless.”

God reached out God's hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth, giving him the blessing of being able to speak, making his excuse unnecessary.

God will take every one of our excuses and turn it into something amazing — wonderful — and will not let you give that excuse any longer. God did that to Moses. God did that to Aaron. Aaron said he was unable to speak, and God gave him the ability. The Apostle Paul stuttered, and yet God made him the greatest voice in the world, proclaiming [to] more people and bringing them to the Gospel of all nations, through the Apostle Paul — offering it to the Gentiles, and speaking to them in a way, that no other could do before. God had to make a new Apostle to fulfill that blessing, and he picked someone who stuttered.

Every one of us has a reason why we can't, but God has a reason why we can; because God will bless us, so that we can then bless others. And, if you have a blessing that doesn't help anyone else, what good is it? It is when we help others.

Open Door People — they resist and they persist. They resist the inclination that they are not capable; they fight through that resistance.

Jeremiah had a terrible task. He had to go and tell the people that unless they behaved, God was going to tear down the Temple. Now, he said that in 627 BCE. He said that during the reign of Josiah, and it actually fell 40 years later when Jeremiah was an old man — in 587 BCE — that Temple fell, because they didn't do what Jeremiah said on behalf of God. But, was Jeremiah to blame? No. All Jeremiah could do was share the words that God showed him.

That brings us to the next one: Open Door people have few regrets.

Now, imagine if Jeremiah had said, "God, I thank you for the touch on the mouth, and now I can speak my words; but I can't do it." And 40 years he watched; all those 40 years Jeremiah would have watched the people fall, sin, ignore God. And, when he watched that Temple go down, he would have felt it was all his fault. Now we know, because of history, we know that that Temple was going to go down anyway — that Jerusalem would be destroyed. But if Jeremiah had not stepped through that door, he would have blamed himself 'til the day he died, never knowing that it wasn't just because of him — that it *was* the people's fault, but he would have blamed himself.

I think that probably more than anything else, when I'm sitting with someone at the end of their life, they mention the joys and they are usually family — they are not about work. I have never heard anybody say, "If I just worked a little more often in my life." I don't think I have heard that yet. But I hear, "I wish I had spent more time with my kids, when they were still home — when they were young."

I hear people say, on the flip side, a list of their regrets and they are better at saying those than anything else, because they have owned them over years and years, reflecting on them, stewing on them, remembering them to the point that they can articulate them perfectly, and those regrets gnaw [at them] every day of their lives until they take their last breath. I have literally had people pray for God's forgiveness as they share those last regrets.

Most of those regrets aren't what we did. Sure, the little ones are: I wish I hadn't eaten so much peach cobbler. [Laughter.] But most of them are the things we didn't do; the doors we didn't go through: "I wish I hadn't done that \_\_\_\_\_." You fill in the blank.

Thank God Jeremiah did, because even though the people didn't listen, we are still talking about him today; because his example, his words were telling, and it took the destruction of the Temple for them to finally listen to what Jeremiah had been saying for 40 years. And when the Temple was rebuilt and destroyed again in AD 70, they remembered Jeremiah's words, going all of the way back; and, we are talking about them today, when we are worried about how our society might be destroyed.

We need to continue to do what we know is right, even when it is uncomfortable, because it is a lot more uncomfortable to get to the end of our lives and say, "Why? Why didn't I do it when I had the chance."

Then, Open Door People are not paralyzed by their insecurity.

All of us have them. I think, the people who have them the most are the big braggers. The ones who show off and look like they have it all — like they are perfect. They are unflappable and they are almost cocky. I think they are the most insecure people.

The most secure people are the ones who wear their lives right out there on their sleeves; who take their risks and you see their falls. You see what they do well and you see when they just flop, and they get back up and say, "Well, [I'm going to] brush myself off, and I'm going to try again," because they don't want those regrets.

Jeremiah did that over and over again, and we shouldn't be upset about our insecurities, because none of us are perfect. The one thing that I absolutely loved about Jeremiah was the way he would do this over and over for 40 years, and no one ever listened. The reason he didn't fall apart and just give up after the 39th year of no one listening, is because he realized that none of it was his doing — it was up to God to use his words and if they were going to crumble, and that wall was going to fall and Jerusalem was going to get taken over, that was God, that wasn't Jeremiah.

That was God. And, the same thing applies when you are sitting with a loved one, and you are telling them about God through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, and you want them to believe — and they look at you like you have three heads. You want them to have faith so badly. You try to explain it and they just don't [get it]. They look at you almost like they want to pat you on the head, because you need this crutch called faith.

It is not about you. You don't get to put the notch in your Bible after every soul you have saved. You have to live with the regret if you *don't* share your faith with them; but you don't have to be the decision-maker. It ain't about how good you are, or what a great person you can claim to be, for you to be able to share the right Scripture lesson of the greatest theological understanding. No, it is about God. And, in that moment they may not hear it. The Holy Spirit may not choose to give it to them at that time. That is up to God — not you and me. It is up to you to be able to share it, and then maybe 41 years later — after their whole world is falling apart — maybe 41 years later, like Jeremiah, they will remember

what you said and they'll turn — in their weakest moment — and they will say, "Alright, I will give it a try."

Sometimes people have to hit rock bottom before they will listen to the faith. Jeremiah's people did. Then, when they were at their worst; there are four verbs in verse 10 that are about destruction — but the last two verbs in that passage are "build up" and "plant." No matter how low you get, or they got, God always ends in a blessing.

Don't worry about your loved ones. That is God's job. Share, be open, even if they hit rock bottom. They are just lost in it. Sometimes that is the greatest moment, when the Holy Spirit comes and lifts them back up, builds them a new foundation, and plants within them the Spirit of the Living God, so they can grow anew.

Keep on trying — but don't let your insecurities get in the way. Don't think you've done anything wrong. You do your part. Don't get frustrated, and believe from the bottom of your heart that you can just let it go and let the Spirit decide when the right time is for that loved one. I promise you God will speak, if not in this world, the next — and bring them home.

Amen.