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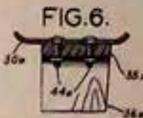
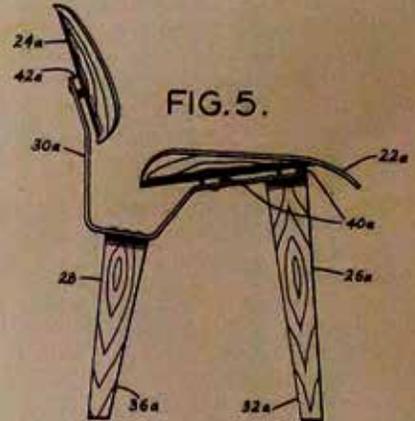
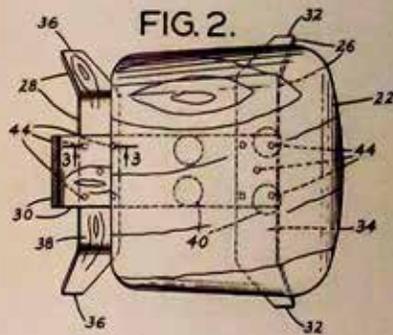
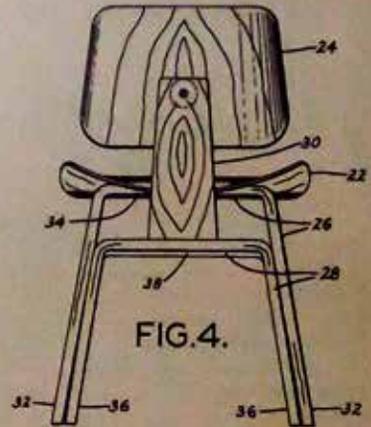
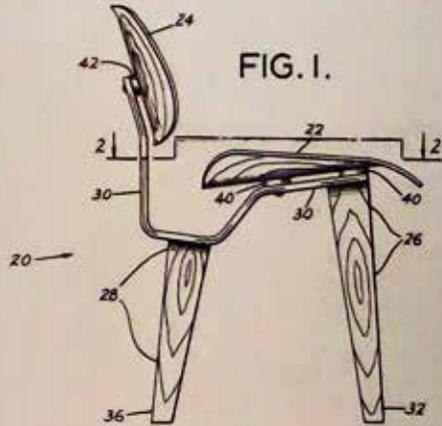
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FURNITURE CONSTRUCTION

Filed March 1, 1947

2 Sheets-Sheet 1



INVENTOR.
CHARLES EAMES
BY
Olson, Carter & Hayward
ATTORNEYS.

CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

Why am I here? Does my life have meaning and purpose?

These are questions all of us face, whether we are eighteen or eighty-five. And they're not new questions. Thousands of years ago, a young son of a faithful priest in Israel pondered the meaning of his life. He wasn't merely on a quest for self-discovery, but was responding to God's call to the difficult life of a prophet.

God's response not only provided an answer to this future prophet, but it helps us as we consider what it means to live on mission for God now. God reminded Jeremiah that before he was born, he was known by His Creator. This reality is true for every human being. No person happened by accident. The Almighty has crafted each person with great care from the very beginning of his or her life, and every life is valuable to Him.

God didn't simply know Jeremiah; He called him and He equipped him for the life ahead. So it is with you and me: God not only calls us, He equips us and sustains us for life on mission with Him.

DANIEL DARLING

Daniel is a speaker, pastor, and author of several books, including *The Characters of Christmas*, *The Dignity Revolution*, and *The Original Jesus*. He is an associate pastor at Green Hill Church in Mt. Juliet, Tenn., and lives with his wife Angela and four children in the Nashville area.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a pen, with the word "DURE" overlaid in large white letters. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and green. The hands are positioned as if about to write, with the pen held between the fingers. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the skin and the metallic sheen of the pen.

DURE

1

Created for a Purpose

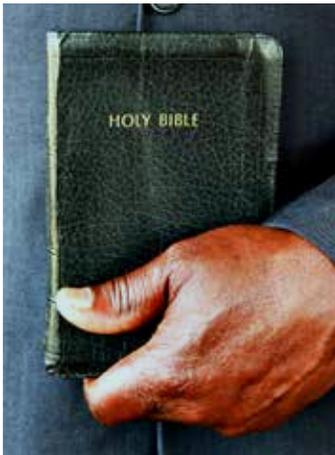


QUESTION 1:

What would a personality test reveal about you?

THE POINT

God values each of us and created us for a purpose.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It seems everyone is interested in self-discovery. Personality tests are incredibly popular. It's not uncommon to see friends list their numbers . . . or animals . . . or sets of identifiers in their social media profiles. Some use them to attempt to explain or justify their behavior. Used correctly, some personality tests can help people see their blind spots and learn how to understand and live with others who have a unique set of gifts or emotions.

The Bible, on the other hand, offers no personality test;

far better, Scripture shows us that God knows every human being before he or she is born, God formed us in the womb, and we all have a unique purpose. Jeremiah the prophet had no personality tests in the sixth century BC, but questions of identity plagued him as he grappled with God's unique call on his life. God's words to this weeping prophet can help us understand who we are as God's children. Our self-discovery comes from knowing who made us, who knows us, and who calls us into His mission.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

JEREMIAH 1:4-5

⁴ **The word of the LORD came to me:** ⁵ **I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.**

Jeremiah was the son of a faithful priest during one of the most tumultuous times in the history of God's people. Living in the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the kingdom had divided, Jeremiah faced a difficult, lifelong mission that few of us would agree to do. God wanted him to speak hard truths to people who didn't want to listen.

God wanted Jeremiah to know that his life, his calling, and the time in which he was born were no accident. None of us will be faced with what Jeremiah was facing, but quite often God also calls us to difficult tasks. We need to know that this is not simply fate or some random event. God's desire to use us in this time and place is a part of His specific purpose and plan from the beginning of time.

Notice how God affirmed Jeremiah: "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born." We learn great truths about who God is and who we are.

QUESTION 2:

How do you respond to the truth that God knows you personally?

- 1. God exists outside of time.** He didn't have a beginning. He wasn't created. He is infinitely bigger than we are. Before we were born, He knew us and knew who we would be. He's also the one who formed us. There are no "self-made" people, only people created by a loving Designer.
- 2. God values life.** Today our culture has shifting definitions of what it means to be human. People debate the issue of the earliest stages of an individual person and the sanctity of human life on social platforms, in the media, and in classrooms. But God has made it clear in His Word that human life begins at conception—and

He values that life. Life is always valuable to God, even when it is in the earliest embryonic stages. Even when life is fragile and dependent on someone else, that human being is known and valued by God.

Listen to the way God assigns personhood and value to the unborn Jeremiah in verse 5: I chose you. I formed you. I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

God's use of personal pronouns to describe Jeremiah before he was born tells us that Jeremiah didn't have to take his first breath before he became a human. He was a human and had life when he was first conceived. Even at the earliest stages of life, Jeremiah was a full human being who, according to Genesis 1:26-27, bore the image of God. And the word God used here to explain that He

"formed" Jeremiah in the womb is the same language that described God's creative work of forming "the man out of the dust from the ground" (Gen. 2:7). David used similar language about his own birth: "For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. . . . My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth" (Ps. 139:13,15).

God works the same way today. Our Creator forms every human being with precision. Every human being has full value from the earliest stages of life. This truth has widespread implications for how we see ourselves and how we see the world. First it reminds us that we are not our own, but were created by a loving Creator. Second, it should inform the way we see others.

JEREMIAH 1:6-8

⁶ But I protested, "Oh no, Lord GOD! Look, I don't know how to speak since I am only a youth."

⁷ Then the LORD said to me: Do not say, "I am only a youth," for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to rescue you. This is the LORD's declaration.

We have a God who forms us and knows us before we were born, but He didn't just leave us there. He chose Jeremiah and set him apart for a purpose. But for the young prophet, the call of God just seemed



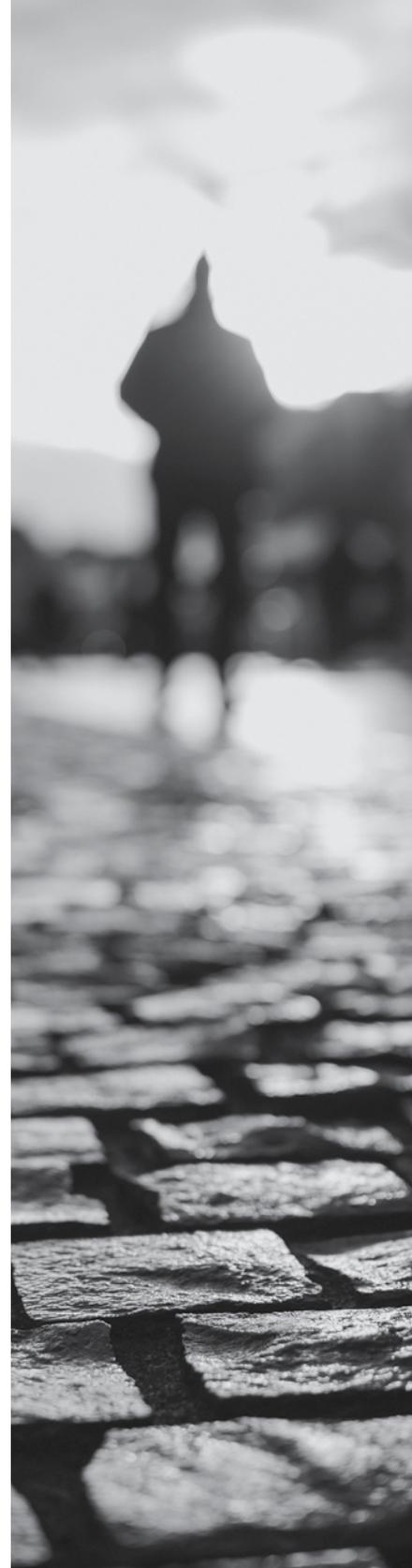
too difficult. Echoing the reservations Moses had about serving (Ex. 4:10), Jeremiah claimed he couldn't possibly be the person for the job because he was not an eloquent speaker and was just too young.

QUESTION 3:

What are some excuses we use for not doing God's will in our lives?

- ▶ **The excuse of deficiencies.** Even at his young age, Jeremiah knew his own deficiencies. Jeremiah didn't approach God with the typical cockiness of youth. He wasn't blind to his weaknesses. It's good to admit our limitations because God can use a person who humbles himself in this way. God works through those who know they are not talented or gifted enough apart from Him. As Paul would later declare, God calls people who are neither wise, powerful, nor noble (1 Cor. 1:26).
- ▶ **The excuse of age and inexperience.** Jeremiah's second rebuttal to God's call was his age and inexperience. Clearly, it wouldn't be wise to put children or "a new convert" (1 Tim. 3:6) in a place of authority, and yet God refused to let Jeremiah use his age as an excuse to opt out of his appointed mission. The Hebrew word for youth could be broadly used, but its general use was to refer to a young man (in contrast to a senior man or an elder). Many scholars believe Jeremiah was a teenager, not yet twenty, at this time. How could a prophet so young move a nation? Only because God said, "I will be with you."

God promises His presence to every believer, regardless of age or season in life. Just as Jeremiah was not to let his age keep him from surrendering to his Creator, so young adults today shouldn't wait until they are older to surrender their lives to Jesus. Being used by God knows no age restrictions. The way of a disciple is to listen to the voice of God and step into His mission, regardless of age or experience. Age is not an issue, for the God who knows us and forms us will be with us. He will be with us as we live out His purpose for our lives.



JEREMIAH 1:9-10

⁹ Then the LORD reached out his hand, touched my mouth, and told me: I have now filled your mouth with my words. ¹⁰ See, I have appointed you today over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant.

God told Jeremiah, “I have now filled your mouth with my words.” The call of God would not be simply about the young prophet’s self-discovery. Jeremiah had received a clear mission of God to preach judgment and salvation to God’s people. Notice the two things God said in His call to Jeremiah:

- ▶ **I have filled you.** To be filled is to be empowered by God. For Jeremiah, God specifically filled Jeremiah’s mouth with His words. Because the Lord put words in Jeremiah’s mouth, when the people of God rejected Jeremiah, they were ultimately rejecting God Himself.
- ▶ **I have appointed you.** To be appointed is to be selected. Of all the people in the world at that time, only one—Jeremiah—was a candidate for this difficult mission of God. He had been hand-selected by God.

We can take comfort in knowing that the same God who equipped a young, obscure prophet to speak hard truths to Judah is the same God who fills us with His power to do what He calls us to do today. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter, giving us power to live boldly on mission for God in the world, empowering us to live out our unique callings and spread the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

QUESTION 4:

When have you been especially aware of your value to God?

We have the promise that God has formed us in His image, that He knew us before we were born, that He empowers us in our weaknesses, and that He is the same as He was in Jeremiah’s day. We also preach Christ. God puts His words in our mouths, just as He filled Jeremiah’s mouth with His words.

Perhaps you feel out of place or ill-equipped. Perhaps you are wondering how God could possibly use you at your age or with your physical limitations. Take heart in knowing that if you are in Christ, God knows your name. He knew you before you were born. And your weaknesses and limitations are a perfect match for His power.

QUESTION 5:

How has our group helped you understand God’s purpose in your life?

THE WAY HE MADE ME

*God specially and specifically equipped Jeremiah to do the work God wanted him to do.
What are some specific ways God has equipped you to do the same?
Consider the categories below.*

How has He equipped your personality and character?

How has He equipped you with resources?

How has He equipped you relationally?

“God doesn’t just love all of us. He loves each of us.”

ADRIAN ROGERS



I AM THE VINE A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Paul E. Kullman

The vine was the first cultivated plant mentioned in Scripture, a fact that meant viticulture (the cultivating of grapes and vineyards) dated at least back to the time of Noah (Gen. 9:20). Although the Hebrew word for “vine” could refer to many types of vines, the term most commonly referred to either a vineyard or grapevine.¹ Vineyards produced fresh grapes, which could then be dried into raisins or currants or squeezed for fresh juice, vinegar, and wine. Growers put all parts of the vine to use: people ate the leaves and used the discarded vines to feed livestock, to make ink, or to tan leather.²

Small vineyard at Tekoa.



VINEYARDS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Many Old Testament texts mention a vine, a vineyard, or its fruit. For instance, while being held in Pharaoh's prison, Joseph interpreted a fellow prisoner's dream, one involving a vine and grapes (Gen. 40:9-13). Although the text doesn't mention a vineyard, grapes evidently grew extremely well in the land of promise. When the 12 spies were in Canaan, "they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes, which was carried on a pole by two men" (Num. 13:23)³. Later, opposing Moses' leadership in the wilderness, Dathan and Abiram said, "you didn't bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey or give us an inheritance of fields and vineyards" (16:14).

Symbols—The Old Testament used vineyards to symbolize prosperity, peace, and permanence. Describing the calm and abundance during Solomon's reign, the Bible says, "Throughout Solomon's reign, Judah and to Beer-sheba, each man under his own vine and his own fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25). Ezekiel spoke of Israel returning from captivity to re-inhabit their homeland: "They will live there securely, build houses, and plant vineyards" (Ezek. 28:26a). In contrast, the destruction of a vineyard or a vineyard's failing to produce could symbolize the Lord's judgment. Declaring His judgment on Judah, the Lord said, "There will be no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, and even the leaf will wither. Whatever I have given them will be lost to them" (Jer. 8:13b). Describing those



Watchtower overlooking grain fields near the Valley of Lebonah in Israel.

living in Jerusalem at the coming Day of the Lord, Zephaniah said the people, because of their sin, would not enjoy the benefit of their labors, including their vineyards (Zeph. 1:13).

Most commonly, though, the Old Testament used grapevines to symbolize Israel itself. The psalmist declared, "You uprooted a vine from Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared a place for it; it took root and filled the land" (Ps. 80:8-9). Maybe the best-known text describing Israel as a vine comes from "the parable of the vineyard" (Isa. 5:1-7). In the parable, God is the vinedresser, the gardener; His people are the vines. God cleared the fertile field, built a protective watchtower, and planted "the finest vines. . . . He expected [the vineyard] to yield good grapes, but it yielded worthless grapes" (v. 2). In other words, in spite of all God had done, Israel was unfaithful. God, therefore, was bringing judgment: "I will remove its [the vineyard's] hedge, and it shall be consumed [destroyed, NIV]. . . . I will make it a wasteland" (vv. 5b-6a). The parable is clear, though, in describing Israel:

The bad fruit is not the responsibility of the vinedresser, who took careful pains to plant and take care of the vine. . . . It is the vine itself that is at fault. It produced bad grapes in spite of all the advantages it had. As a result, the vines will be destroyed.⁴

THE DISCIPLES' UNDERSTANDING

Against this backdrop, Jesus made statements about Him being the vine and His Father the vinedresser (John 15:1-8). The contrast between Jesus' words and the declarations in Isaiah are stark. Whereas Israel had sinned, Jesus was sinless (Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5). When the Lord of Hosts looked to His vineyard, Israel, hoping to find justice and righteousness, He found instead "bloodshed" (ESV) and heard "cries of wretchedness" (Isa. 5:7). God's people had not been obedient to what He had wanted them to do; instead they had been quite the opposite. Jesus, however, submitted Himself fully to the Father's will and was "obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8b; see also Luke 22:42).

What would the disciples think? They likely would have been perplexed as they heard Jesus describe Himself as the vine. They would have been familiar with Isaiah's parable in which the vine was destroyed. Jesus went on, however, to make the distinction clear. He was the vine—they were the branches, and they were to abide in Him (John 15:5). In Jesus' "I am" statement, the vine would not be destroyed. Those who did not abide in Him, those who were unproductive branches, however, would be gathered and burned (v. 6).

Jesus instructed His disciples, then, that in Him they were to bear fruit. He would be their source and their supply. As they relied on Christ and obeyed His commands, fruit would come. Would Jesus' disciples have been surprised upon hearing they would be able to give the Father glory in this way? Maybe. Encouraged that Jesus was their source and strength? Absolutely!



Winepress dated to the sixth century BC.

1. John C. H. Laughlin, "Vine" in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 1392-94.
2. Irene Jacob and Walter Jacob, "Flora; Vine" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. in chief David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:810.
3. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® (HCSB).
4. "Vine, Vineyard" in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, gen. ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 915.

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