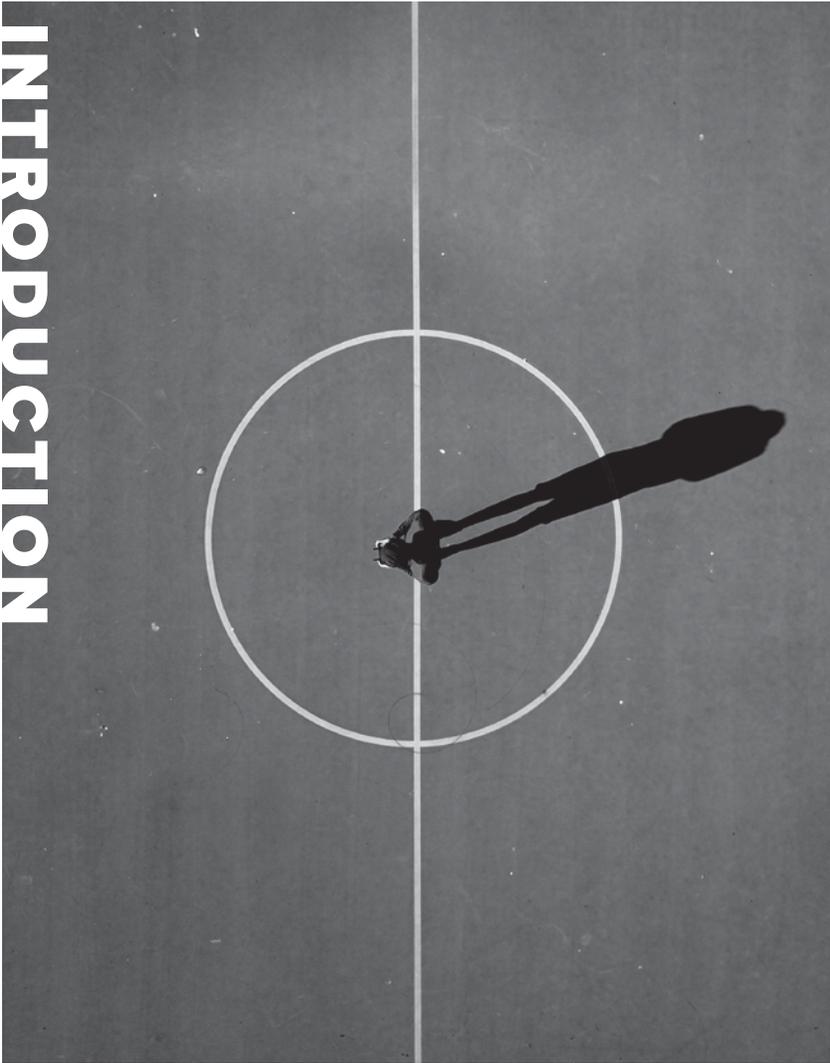


INTRODUCTION



CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

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

These are questions we all face, whether we're eighteen or eighty-five. And they aren't 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 with God in the twenty-first century. God reminded Jeremiah that before he was born, he was known by the Creator of the heavens and earth. This reality is true for every human being. No person happened by accident. The Almighty 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 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.

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PURR

Special Focus: 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. He 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.

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 and difficult truths to a 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. God's desire to use us in this time and place was a part of His specific purpose and plan from the beginning of time.

human life. 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 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" (emphasis added).

God's use of personal pronouns to describe Jeremiah before he was born tells us that Jeremiah 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" (Genesis 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" (Psalm 139:13,15).

Every human being has full value from the earliest stages of life. This truth has widespread implications for how we see ourselves and the world. First it reminds us that we are not our own, but were created by a loving Creator. Second, it informs the way we are to see others.

QUESTION 2:

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

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

- ▶ **God exists outside of time.** God 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. There are no "self-made" people, only people created and designed by a loving Designer.
- ▶ **God values life.** 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

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.

God chose Jeremiah and set him apart for a purpose. But for the young prophet, the call of God just seemed too difficult. Jeremiah claimed he couldn’t possibly be the person for the job.

▶ **The excuse of deficiencies.** Jeremiah wasn’t blind to his weaknesses. It is good to admit our limitations, because God can use a person who humbles himself in this way. God works through those who know they aren’t talented or gifted enough apart from Him. As Paul would later declare, God calls people who are neither wise, powerful, nor noble (see 1 Corinthians 1:26).

Such a humble recognition of our weakness is quite different from self-loathing. Sure, Jeremiah would be called to a task far greater than he could pull off in his own strength, but he needed encouragement that it was God Himself who formed him—with both his strengths and weaknesses. The same God who formed Jeremiah would empower him and equip him for the task ahead. God didn’t make a mistake in placing Jeremiah in that time and place with the gifts and skills he had, and God doesn’t make a mistake in the unique and difficult callings He sets before us. When we feel unworthy, ill-equipped, or out of place, we can lean into the truth God spoke to a young prophet in the sixth century BC: I chose you, I formed you, and I set you apart.

▶ **The excuse of age and inexperience.**

Jeremiah’s second rebuttal to God’s call was his age and inexperience. 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 at this time. How could a prophet so young move a nation? Only because God said, “I will be with you.”

QUESTION 3:

What are some excuses we use for not doing what God commands us to do?

God promises His presence to every believer, regardless of age or season in life. Just as Jeremiah wasn’t 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. The God who knows us and forms us will be with us as we live out His purpose for our lives.

“
You don't need a plan; you just need to be
PRESENT.

”

BOB GOFF



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.

The call of God wouldn't just be about Jeremiah's self-discovery. This wasn't about following his heart or pursuing his dreams. Jeremiah had received a clear and unmistakable mission of God to preach judgment and salvation to God's people. Notice the two things God said in His call to Jeremiah:

1. **I have filled you.** To be *filled* is to be empowered by God. He specifically filled Jeremiah's mouth with His words. What Jeremiah would preach to the people of God would be God's divine declarations. So when the people of God rejected Jeremiah, they were ultimately rejecting God Himself.
2. **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.

QUESTION 4:

What makes you feel afraid about the work God has called you to do?

We live in an age of the Holy Spirit who is present in the church. So we can't apply what God said to Jeremiah in quite the same way that God applied it to Jeremiah. And yet, 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 gives us power to live out our unique callings and spread the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

We don't prophesy in the same way as Jeremiah, but we are still part of God's mission "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant." God's new kingdom has dawned in Christ, a kingdom that is renewing and rebuilding what sin has corrupted and destroyed.

That work won't be fully finished until Jesus returns, but until then we have the promise that God has formed us in His image, knew us before we were born, empowers us in our weaknesses. And though we are not prophets, we speak words that aren't our own. In our own roles, we preach Christ.

Perhaps you are wondering how God could possibly use you. Take heart in knowing that if you are in Christ, God knew you before you were born. And your weaknesses and limitations are a perfect match for His power.

QUESTION 5:

How do we make ourselves available for God's use?

I CHOOSE YOU

*Jeremiah was specially and specifically equipped to do the work God wanted him to do.
Answer at least three of the following questions to help you identify specific ways God has equipped you.*

How has God equipped your character?

How has God equipped you with resources?

How has God equipped you relationally?

How has God equipped you positionally—where you live, work, worship, and so on?

How has God equipped you experientially?

How has God equipped you with spiritual gifts?

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT THIS YEAR

By Jason Hayes

If you're anything like me, you may be a month into the New Year looking around at the new additions to your life—the noise, the stuff and the activities—wondering if they're really helping.

What if you tried something different this year? What if you broke the pattern of always adding to your life and instead chose to remove some things for its betterment?

Recently, I came to the conclusion that I needed to do this. The more I looked at Scripture and examined my life in comparison to what it said, I realized that adding more stuff wasn't what I needed. In fact, I lacked something that couldn't be fulfilled by adding something else.

I lacked space.

I needed space to hear the voice of God in my life. I needed space to be a more sensitive husband—space to be a more engaged father. I needed space to be the pastor God was calling me to be.

I needed freedom from the unnecessary things that cluttered my heart and mind. So here are some ways to de-clutter your heart and mind. It is my hope that through this you will find a renewed focus.

MUTE THE NOISE

Let's face it. We live in a time and culture that is overloaded by information. Through technology and media, we have unprecedented access to data, entertainment, and “connectivity.” But it's important to be cautious to insure that we're allowing these resources to be helpful rather than hurtful.

As a family, we removed cable TV and now spend much more time together playing games and talking.

JUST SAY NO

Are you directing your schedule or is it directing you?

One Sunday, I remember being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of our commitments: morning worship gatherings with our church, a baseball practice for our oldest son, a birthday party for our friend's son, a wedding shower for another friend, an activity with our church student ministry, and then a fellowship with our small group that evening.

It was time to kindly decline some invitations, block family time on our calendars, and simply spend more time at home together. It's amazing what joy we now find in an afternoon or evening in our home to unwind.

GET RID OF EXCESS STUFF

Most people aren't true hoarders, but it's amazing how stuff can accumulate over time. While there is nothing innately wrong with possessions, our hearts can be easily distracted by stuff.

There's no exact formula for how much is too much, but if you spend more time focusing on your stuff than you do on God and people, you may need to make some changes.

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Article courtesy of *HomeLife* magazine.