

Finding True North

by Dan Webster

Jeremiah was a faithful prophet with very few hiccups in his walk with God. The older I get the more that impresses me. I turned 50 this last year and I've found myself reflecting more on the concept of *faithfulness*. I'm not sure exactly why. Maybe it's because another close friend just confessed to an affair after hiding it for a year or maybe it's because staying on course over the long run is just plain hard. I don't know. What I do know is that it's a tough to keep *true north* in mind in both my personal and ministry life.

True north is a phrase that's often used to define a person who has clarity and direction in his or her life and ministry. When you've got *true north* in your spiritual life, all is well with you and the Lord. You are abiding in Him, feeding consistently on His word and attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When you have *true north* in your vocation, i.e. your ministry, you know who you are, what the heck you are doing and why you are doing it. Your ministry's identity and goals are clear. Ever lose *true north* in either your personal or ministry life? Me too. It's a monstrous challenge to keep disciplined and clear about who we are and what we should be doing.

Enter Jeremiah...the faithfulness of this prophet over the entirety of his life blows me away. Here's a guy who received a clear call from God when he was young. God tells Jeremiah (1:4-8)...*listen son, I made you. I'll protect you. I'll fight for you. I'll put my words in your mouth. I'll deliver you. So, get after it.*

Jeremiah 1

*4 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."
6 Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold,
I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth."
7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,
'Because everywhere I send you, you shall go,
And all that I command you, you shall speak.
8 "Do not be afraid of them,
For I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord...*

Even though verse 6 reveals that Jeremiah was a reluctant leader, he did as God requested. With the promises of God clearly in mind Jeremiah launched his new ministry. Then what happened? How did he do? Just survey the first nineteen chapters of the book of Jeremiah and you'll see he's completely faithful to all God asked. He stepped to the plate of ministry and made bold proclamation after bold proclamation. His heart was captured and positively addicted to speaking God's words and doing God's wishes. He seemed to have little problem keeping *true north* in his devotion to God and in what he was to do.

Jeremiah developed man-sized courage. Up to chapter 20 we see a guy who has unusual clarity on *true north* in both his personal and ministry life. Chapter 20 records a hiccup in his faith journey. It's a moment I can certainly identify with. As a matter of fact, I think every authentic leader experiences a moment or two like this some time in his or her life. Maybe you are in a time like this right now.

Jeremiah loses true north

Jeremiah 20:7-18 reveals a time when the prophet lost *true north* and it appeared that his life was coming apart. What led up to this? In the first couple verses of chapter 20 we read that Pashhur the priest heard Jeremiah prophecy and he didn't like what he heard. So, he grabbed Jeremiah...had him beaten and put in stocks. How humiliating for the man. Nothing but straight A's on his faithfulness report card and he got the bejesus beaten out of him.

The Bible goes on to tell us that Jeremiah was released the next day. The beating he received annoyed and angered the prophet. Once he'd been released, rather than sheepishly turn and run away, he looked right into the face of Pashhur and let loose with a prophecy that pierced the priest to the core. Read what Jeremiah said to Pashhur...

3 Then it came about on the next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, that Jeremiah said to him, "Pashhur is not the name the Lord has called you, but rather terror on every side..."

4 "For thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am going to make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and while your eyes look on, they will fall by the sword of their enemies..."

5 'I shall also give over all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its costly things...to the hand of their enemies, and they will plunder them, take them away, and bring them to Babylon.

6 'And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die..."

Whoa...let him have it Jeremiah...hit him again! This prophet was not only faithful...he was fearless. At least up to this point he was fearless.

Jeremiah 20:7f is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It's in this chapter that we see a servant of God lose *true north*. Not only did he lose *true north*, his compass lay shattered on the ground.

After he gave Pashhur a tongue lashing, Jeremiah went outside the city, sat down, and had a heart to heart conversation with God concerning where his *faithfulness* had gotten him. Here we have an honest moment where pain and confusion pour out of the prophet's heart. I believe in this moment Jeremiah was rocked by the implications of what it meant to follow God faithfully. In a deeply

[OPTIONAL SIDEBAR

Just read a few of his prophetic words (I'll paraphrase a little)...

2:8 "You people have walked after things that don't profit. You walked after emptiness and became empty."

4:19 "My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! My heart is pounding in me; I cannot be silent"

5:30 "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land.. the prophets prophesy falsely and My people love it!"

8:9-11 "...you've rejected the word of the Lord ... every one is greedy for gain...every one practices deceit...you say all is well, but there is no peace..."

15:16 "Thy words were found and I ate them, And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts."

Then in chapter 18 God tells him to go to the potters house and watch. As the potter spins the clay he saw it was spoiled so he remade it into another vessel. Jeremiah gets an up close and personal clay pot lesson. Then he's told to turn to Israel and alert them to the joyful news that God can and will deal with them just like the potter smashed and remade a new pot.

Then in chapter 19:3, 4, 8 & 10 God tells Jeremiah to go buy a pot, get the elders, go out to the valley and say to them, "Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place...because they have forsaken Me...I shall also make this city a desolation and an object of hissing...then you are to **break the jar** in the sight of the men who accompany you." Wow, go buy a pot and smash it as an object lesson to these people.]

honest melancholy moment Jeremiah considers that maybe following God had ruined his life. Check out the man's own words...

*7 O Lord, Thou hast deceived me and I was deceived;
Thou hast overcome me and prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
Everyone mocks me.
8 For each time I speak, I cry aloud;
I proclaim violence and destruction,
Because **for me** the word of the Lord has resulted
In reproach and derision all day long.*

With the same intensity he'd spoken to Pashhur the priest he now turns to God and gives Him a piece of his mind...*hey, you lied to me! You deceived me. I've been faithful and you said you'd protect and deliver me. Man, do you have a weird definition of the word deliver! I do what you say and I get creamed again and again!*

Wow, Jeremiah is talking turkey, he's spilling his guts...shooting straight -- it's a bitch and moan session before God. Is God okay with this? Is God safe? We know the answer to both those questions is...yes! For Jeremiah it didn't matter, he had to risk speaking because if this stuff didn't come out Jeremiah would have gone crazy.

What had knocked Jeremiah off *true north*? It was the fact that life wasn't going as he thought it should. This gut level honest talk with God was part of what enabled him to get back to *true north* in his ministry and faith journey. He aired everything out, God listened, and then he got his balance back and moved on. Was this a serious hiccup in his faith walk? Yes...but he catches his breath and gets back in the race. You can read the rest of Chapter 20 and 21 to see how this episode in the prophet's life plays out.

The Two Works of Leadership

I love this passage because it reveals to me that big time players in the kingdom of God have low moments where they lose their way. Let's think about us for a moment and our leadership...our *faithfulness*. As I think about Jeremiah I'm reminded that there are **two works** every leader is called to. The Apostle Paul spells them out in Ephesians 2:10...

*"For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus
for good works, that we should walk in them."*

Simply put, spiritual leadership is about being faithfully involved in these *two works*. Your *true north* is also all about these two works. The two works are easy to state and explain, but difficult to hold in balance.

The first work is *the first work* for a reason. It is primary and where leadership begins. The first work is about being the "*workmanship*" of God before we run out and attempt to do 'good works' for God. Because I have the privilege of being around leaders most of the time I find myself needing to remind them that they *are* the work of God too. They just don't *do* the work of God.

Both these works have a *true north*. This first work is a life long faith walk where we learn that our best ministry always flows from intimacy with God. It's our intimacy with God that puts us in a place where He can work on us. Have you lost *true north* here?

The second work of *doing good works* is about the application of your gifts, calling and passions. It's about who you are...why you're here on the planet...what you should be doing...and what you are all about. Ever lose *true north* on this one? Some of us have yet to discover *true north* when it comes to who we are. Some of us are experiencing a change in calling and we wonder what that means. Your ministry's *true north* grows out of your personal *true north*.

I don't know where you are right now. Most likely you are scrambling to put together this weeks program and message. I hear that. Let me remind you of the 'big picture' challenge we both face. The challenge is to live in *true north* as God leads us all the days of our lives.

The 2003 gathering in New Mexico is about finding *true north* personally and collectively. It's about helping each of us get clear on being the workmanship of God and getting about doing the good works God has for us. It's going to challenge us to be both fully devoted and greatly used. This is what life is all about. I can't wait to be a part. See you there.