

TEXT: Jeremiah 1:4-10, 1 Timothy 4:12, 2 Timothy 1:3-7

TITLE: God's Youth Movement

THESIS: Do we see what God sees in our youth?

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (CSB)

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.

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 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.

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.

INTRO: The Tragic Story of Steve

In her book “**Growing Young**”, Dr. Kara Powell tells the story of a young boy named **Steve**. The story begins like this:

13-year-old Steve attended church every week with his parents. This particular Sunday, he had stayed after the worship service to ask this pressing question: “Pastor, if I raise my finger, will God know which one I’m going to raise even before I raise it?” The pastor replied, “Yes, God knows everything.”

Haunted by the plight of African children suffering from dire famine, Steve then pulled out a *Life* magazine cover depicting two children tormented by starvation. He asked [the pastor] logical follow-up: “Well, does God know about this and what’s going to happen to those kids?” The pastor gave a similar response: “Steve, I know you don’t understand, but yes, God knows about that.”

Let me **interrupt** Dr. Powell’s story to ask you a question.

If you can picture Steve in your mind’s eye, who do you see?

- Do you see a **spoiled brat** wasting the pastor’s time?
- A **nerdy overthinker**, contemplating things not worth discussing?
- Or a **bleeding heart activist**, a “woke liberal” getting bent out of shape over social injustice?

Dr Powell's story continues:

If you were Steve, would you be satisfied with the pastor's answer to your question? Steve wasn't. He walked out of his congregation that day and never again worshiped at a Christian church.... Perhaps Steve wondered why God would allow the suffering he himself had experienced in his 13 years, which included bullying at school, financial struggles at home, and most painfully, being relinquished for adoption by his birth parents.... Maybe you have heard of Steve. His last name is Jobs.

Steve Jobs, founder and CEO of Apple, Inc., was a churchgoing teenager who wrestled with big questions... Imagine if Steve Jobs had his questions taken seriously by his faith community and he had later poured his entrepreneurial brilliance not only into furthering high-tech interfaces but also into furthering the gospel and mobilizing others to respond to needs globally. Our world would be different today.

That pastor of that church failed to see what God saw in 13-year-old Steve Jobs.

And that haunting story should lead us to ask this question: **Do we see what God sees in our young people?** Not just youth in general, but specifically in our context. **What does God see** in the young people of **this church** who call EAG home...and in the young people of **Rocky Mount**, especially those who haven't come home yet?

A few moments ago in our Scripture, we hear God lay out what He sees in a young man named Jeremiah. Over the rest of our time together, I want to unpack the question of, “***What exactly did God see in Jeremiah? What perspective does God have of young people?***” And based on what God sees, “***How should God’s perspective of our young people affect our attitude towards them?***”

POINT 1 – God sees Jeremiah’s CALLING

Notice first of all how God sees ***Jeremiah’s calling***.

1:4-5 (CSB)

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.

God saw what Jeremiah and the people around him could not see.
God saw the heavenly perspective.

We see the ***human perspective*** of Jeremiah in the very first verse of the book (1:1, CSB):

1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, ***one of the priests*** living in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.

In other words, Jeremiah is a **PK**—a “**preacher’s kid**”, or a “**priest’s kid**”.

And based on what we read later in **verse 6**, perhaps Jeremiah lived in his **father’s shadow** and felt he **didn’t have much to offer**.

“My **dad** is the priest; he’s **chosen**, he’s **special**, he’s the one who’s trusted to serve You everyday. I’m just a **nobody**.”

But look at the calling that God sees in Jeremiah....and think about this in light of our own young people.

1A – I chose you...

- “Jeremiah, **you’re** the one that I’ve chosen for this calling. Even before you were conceived, **I already had you in mind** to be My servant for this specific **day**, **time**, and **purpose**.”

1B – ...I set you apart...

- The original language is even stronger; the Hebrew word for “set apart” means, “I have removed you from **common use**, and I’ve made you **holy for service in My sanctuary**.”
- “You’re not just a **random nobody**, Jeremiah; you’re not a **commoner**; I specifically **made you holy** and **set you apart** for the purposes of My Kingdom.”

1C – ...I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

“Jeremiah, I have placed a **purpose** and **calling** over your life. You are not a **leftover**; you’re not a **reject** or an **accident** or a **spare part** that’s consigned to **sit on the shelf** until I can find something for you; but **right now** in this moment, I have a **handpicked assignment** for you.”

POINT 1 – APPLICATION

Let me speak this over the youth and young adults of our church: **God has placed a calling on your life.**

- Don’t ever see yourself as just a **Sunday morning nobody**
- Or a **spare helper** for Kids Church
- Or an **extra voice** for the worship team
- Or a **misfit** or a **leftover** or a **reject** that doesn’t belong

God has given you a **specific purpose** and **handmade calling** that He has **not** given to anyone else.

- Your **presence** here matters...
- Your **family** matters...
- Your **dreams**, your **concerns**, your **hopes**—they matter...

For our **older adults** this morning, here’s something to consider...

Out of all the churches where God could’ve placed our young people, He chose to place them here...because He knows that we need them.

Have you ever thought about that?

Sometimes, we only think of **the other way around**.

- “The young people need **us!**”
- “They need to be **directed**, **corrected**, and **whipped** into shape”
- “If not for **our** spirituality and influence, they’d be **hooligans!**”

Yes, that’s true to an extent...**but as much as the younger generation needs the older, the older generation also needs the younger!**

- We need their **INFLUENCE**...to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a culture that **speaks** a **whole different language** and **thinks** from a **whole different mindset** than what you and I came from.
- We need their **INNOVATION**...to make sure that we as **individuals** and as a **church** are not just **stagnating** in “the good **old** days”, but **pursuing** the “good **new** days” that God wants us to discover.
- We need their **INNOCENCE**...to remind us of how **passionate** and **open** we were in our early relationship with God...before our own passion and our own innocence got **hijacked** by **church hurt**, **church politics**, **forgotten dreams** and the **hard knocks** of growing up.

Out of all the churches where God could've placed our young people, He chose to place them here. He's called them here; He's positioned them here; for **our benefit**, as well as theirs.

When you look at our young people...**can you see their calling? Do you see what God sees?**

TRANSITION to POINT 2

God saw Jeremiah's **calling**...but beyond just the calling, He also saw Jeremiah's **wondering**.

POINT 2 – God Sees Jeremiah's WONDERING

Jeremiah 1:6

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

Jeremiah speaks to a conflict that every adolescent wrestles with at some point. It's a conflict of 5 words: "**I am only a youth.**"

Whether young people will admit it or not, there **is** a **self-consciousness** and a **vulnerability** that comes with being young.

Behind the **viral TikToks**, behind the **Instagram filters**, behind the **juvenile bravado** that pop culture pumps out constantly...

I think a lot of young people are still wrestling with Jeremiah's vulnerability. "I'm only a youth...I'm only a kid...I'm only a teen...I'm only in my 20's...does my life have any meaning beyond that?"

- "Does anybody see me beyond my social media account?"
- "Does anybody care for me?" About where I'm going and who I'm becoming?
- "Can anybody speak truth, direction, and purpose into my life?"
- "Will anybody take me seriously?"

And in the middle of Jeremiah's wondering—as he wrestles openly with his insecurity and inadequacy—into that struggle, God speaks.

7 Then the LORD said to me: [What was I thinking? You're right. Go work a job, wait 20 years, and let's try this again once you've actually paid your dues and earned some life experience. ESV = Extremely Spicy Version]

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

Rather than indict Jeremiah, God invites Jeremiah.

Instead of indicting Jeremiah for his weakness, God invites Jeremiah to experience divine presence in the midst of human weakness. God turns a human deficit into a divine positive.

- 2A “Do not say, I am only a youth...”
“Jeremiah, don’t allow your inadequacy to become bigger than My power.”
- 2B “...you will go to everyone I send you and speak to everyone I tell you.”
Very important—this is not a threat from God, but an encouragement. “Jeremiah, you don’t have to figure this out by yourself; I will set you up with the right people and in the right circumstances to speak.”
- 2C “Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to rescue you.” “Jeremiah, you’re not in this alone. My power and My presence will be beside you and within you all the way.”

Rather than indict Jeremiah, God invites Jeremiah.

POINT 2 – APPLICATION

I think of what the Apostle Paul said to his young protégé Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 (CSB):

“Don’t let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.”

This is one of those verses where it's tough to swallow the **whole thing**.

- If you're **younger** like me, you're all about that the **first half**. "**Don't let anyone despise your youth...**"

And you might need to be **convicted** by the **second half**... "**What does my example look like?** In my **lifestyle** and in my **choices**, am I setting the **very best example** of **following Jesus** that I know how to set?"

- If you're **older**, maybe you're all about the **second half**. "...**set an example for the believers...**"

And you might need to be **convicted** by the **first half**. "**Don't let anyone despise your youth...**" **What's our heart towards our youth?** Do we see their youthfulness as a **liability to despise** or an **asset to cherish?**

Don't get me wrong:

- **Yes**, teens have **issues**.
- **Yes**, they need **correction**.
- **No**, they're not the **be-all-and-end-all** that culture says they are.

Yet God still says to young people... "**Do not say, 'I am only a youth.'**"

“Your inexperience and your weakness does not scare Me from placing My hand on you.”

If God can see our youth that way...**what kind of response should that elicit from us?**

Are we “indicting” or “inviting” our young people?

- **Do we want to indict them for their wondering/youthfulness?**
“You **dumb kids**; you’re always on your **phones**, you **dress** weird, you **talk** funny; you’re **way worse** than my friends and I were at your age. **Why can’t you be more like us?**”
- **Or we do want to “invite them” to experience God’s presence, reflected through the influence of our lives?**
“Young man... **Spend some time** with me. Let’s **throw the football**; let’s **go for coffee**; let’s **change the oil** on this car together; and let me tell you all about **the God who loves you** and the **potential** that He’s placed into you.”

TRANSITION to POINT 3

Do we see our youth the way God sees them? The way God saw Jeremiah?

God saw Jeremiah’s **calling**...his **wondering**...and finally... God sees Jeremiah’s **anointing**.

POINT 3 – God Sees Jeremiah’s ANOINTING

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.

Isn't it **interesting** how God speaks to Jeremiah in the **present tense**?

- It's not, "I **might** fill your mouth," or "**eventually** I'll fill your mouth..."
- Instead, He says, "I have **now** filled your mouth with My words."
- "I have appointed you **today**...to carry out My mission on the earth."

Jeremiah might not have **felt** like he was anointed in that moment.

He might not have felt any **immediate evidence** of God **filling his mouth** and **setting him up** over nations and kingdoms.

But over the next 40 years that the book of Jeremiah covers, **we see God's anointing on Jeremiah come to fruition**. We read how **He achieves** His purposes **in** and **through** Jeremiah's ministry.

And thousands of years later, God's anointing on Jeremiah **still makes an impact** on you, and me, and everyone else who **reads the words** that God spoke through him.

POINT 3 – APPLICATION

Do we see what God sees?

Do we see our young people the way that God sees them? Do we see them not only in the now, but in the future?

That's a question that God has **drilled into my heart** more and more as I've gone deeper into youth ministry over the past 2 years. I don't always see young people the way that God wants me to.

- I think of the times when I've **evaluated vocal solos** at **Fine Arts**...and **every year**, there's always "**that one student**" who tries to sing....operative word "**tries**"...and it can be the **most awkward thing in the world** figuring out what to **write on their feedback sheet** without **hurting their feelings**.
- Then I think of the times when I've **volunteered at youth camp**...and **every year**, there's always "that one camper" who is so **obnoxious**, and his **behavior** is **such a pain** to deal with, you start wondering, "What could God **possibly do** with an **idiot** like that?"
- Or I think about when I'm **ordering food** from Zaxby's, and a **teenaged employee** might **mess up my order**, and in my frustration, I think, "How **zoned out** do you have to be to serve me a **salad** without **dressing?**"

In the folly of my own, entitled selfishness, I **neglect to ask** that all important question: **Do I see what God sees in those young people?**

- ‘Cause that “singer” at Fine Arts... He might not ever have a **music ministry**...but God might anoint him with a **marketplace ministry** that will **change the lives** of people in his community.
- The **employee** at **Zaxby’s**... Perhaps she’s **distracted** because her **homelife is falling apart**...and God wants to **raise her up** to stop the cycle of **drugs**, of **divorce**, of **hopelessness**, and establish a **new standard** of **Christ-centered stability** in her **family tree**.
- And even the **crazy idiot** at **youth camp**... What if God **gets a hold** of that kid’s **unhinged energy**...and what if the **wild troublemaker of today** becomes the **dynamic evangelist of tomorrow?**

Do I see what God sees?

And the reason that question hits so hard is because of what **someone else saw in me** when I was younger...

TRANSITION to DR. FRANKLIN

Some of you have me share about my history professor at Bible College, a man named **Dr. Franklin**. I want to close with a particular story that I’ve shared in **other settings**, but **never before** on a **Sunday morning**.

DR. FRANKLIN: “Far more and far better...”

When I was an **18-year-old freshman**, Dr. Franklin gave our class an **assignment** where we had to spend **eight hours** in total solitude—no **phone**, no **music**, no **earthly distractions** of any kind. **All we were allowed** was a **Bible**, a **pen**, and a **prayer journal**.

And once our eight hours were over, we had to **transcribe our prayers** from that journal into a **Word doc**, **print** it off, and **send** it in for grading.

Toward the **end** of my **eight-hours in solitude**, I got to a point where I was feeling a little **restless**; **running out** of things to pray about; and in a moment of **well-intentioned but naïve innocence**, I wrote about Dr. Franklin in my prayer journal.

...please bless Dr. Franklin today... He’s such an amazing prof—and no, I’m NOT writing this for extra marks. He’s so solid and uncompromising in his stand on Your Word...yet he has so much grace, humility, and cheerfulness. Please make me like that, Lord.

Looking back, I realize **some profs** might’ve taken that the **wrong way** and accused me of **buttering up**.

But Dr. Franklin didn’t go there, and he only wrote **two things**...

First, in response to my words about him, he simply wrote four words in the margin: **“Thanks. You’ve encouraged me.”** And that would’ve been enough.

But then under the **last line** where I wrote about his attributes, and said, “Please make me like that, Lord”, Dr. Franklin **underlined** that statement, and wrote **one simple prayer** of his own: “But please Lord, far more and far better.”

That **wrecks** me every time I remember it.

When I was a freshman, **people did not see me in the best light**.

- I entered Bible School carrying **multiple years** of **church hurt**, **self-condemnation**, and a lot of what I know now was **unresolved depression** and **anxiety**.
- From that place of **dysfunction**, I developed a **reputation** as a **high-strung, holier-than-thou knucklehead**; super **legalistic**, super **uptight**, always **starting arguments**, **picking fights**...
- I was **a self-righteous hotshot** on the outside...but **scared** and **hating myself** on the inside.

Because of all that, I **made a lot of enemies** my freshman year. And my inner world began **trending** down a **very dangerous** path.

At the same time that I was an **18-year-old punk**...Dr. Franklin was my **polar opposite**.

- **65** years old
- **Two** undergrad degrees, plus a **Masters**, plus a **Doctorate**
- Over **40 years of full-time ministry**
- **35** of those years at the **Bible College** (he also taught my dad back in the day)
- When Dr. Franklin wasn't busy with the college, he was in **high demand** as a **speaker** at **camps** and **conferences** nationwide

For **decades**, Dr. Franklin was a **highly-renowned pillar** in the PAOC.

This man had forgotten more about ministry than I will ever know...

And yet in my prayer journal...the prayer journal of an **18-year-old punk** whose **life was falling apart**...Dr. Franklin had the **humility** to write those words...

"But please Lord, far more and far better."

How was I supposed to live up to that?

How does an **18-year-old troublemaker** do far more and far better than a **65-year-old ministry legend?**

How could Dr. Franklin write that prayer?

He could write it because **he chose to see me how God saw me**...not how **my friends** saw me...not as **I** saw me...but as **God** saw me.

Do we see what God sees in our young people?

APPEAL

Dr. Franklin passed away last year at the age of 77.

Ever since his passing, the Holy Spirit has kept **stirring those words** in my heart. **“Please Lord, far more and far better.”**

I think the Lord would say to Englewood Assembly of God today: **“Are you praying those words over the youth of this church?”**

- “Are you **willing** to **see your youth** the way that I see them?”
- “Do you see them as a **problem** to be **analyzed**...as a **burden** to **tolerate**...or as a **God-given treasure** to **embrace** and **bless?**”
- “Do you want them to just **behave**, **stay in their lane**, and **not get in the way** of church **as you like it?** Or are you willing to pray that they **surpass** your legacy?”
- **“Do you see them the way that I see them?”**

Will we see what God sees??

GOSPEL CALL + CONCLUSION

When we think of how God sees our young people...we should ultimately be reminded of how God sees all of us.

One of the names for God in the Bible is the Hebrew name El Roi—the God who sees.

The same God who saw Jeremiah sees every single person in this room—old and young, male and female, steady follower and wounded doubter.

And the promise that God gave to Jeremiah... “Don’t be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you...” That promise of God’s presence is available to you today because of the blood, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So as we sing this last song, we’re going to create space around this altar for you and God to have a moment together...for you to connect personally with the God who sees you.

- Maybe you’ve never reached out to God before.
- Maybe you’ve tried to reach out, but it feels in your head and in your heart like God is distant, and you’re not able to break through.
- Maybe you did reach out to God a long time ago...but life changed, circumstances changed, and it’s been a minute since you and God last had a meaningful heart-to-heart.

Wherever you're at, whoever you are today...God sees you. He's reaching out to you; will you reach out to Him?

Let's sing this last song together...

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