

To say that Jeremiah's prophetic ministry taxed him is an understatement. Ridicule, persecution, and rejection were his lot. Yet God's enablement propelled him into four decades of faithfulness as God's spokesman.

Jeremiah's brittle confidence, contrasted with God's pledge of his presence, resonated with me. God's Spirit branded this "but the Lord" story on my mind, instilling my own persistence as a professor. As of this book's release date, I'm finishing thirty-three years on the faculty. The only explanation for my longevity is "but the Lord." He equipped me for what he called me to do.

When you don't feel up to tackling God's assignment, anchor your thoughts in the deep waters of Jeremiah 1:4-9.

Yes, But . . .

From a list of over fifty "but God" references, I've cherry-picked eight more with relevance to ministry involvement. The left column identifies a felt need or a threatening circumstance. The right side counters with a verse containing the conjunction that makes all the difference. The boldfaced words represent my emphasis, not that of biblical authors.

<i>I'm drained physically and despondent in spirit. My resolve to keep going is waning.</i>	"My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26).
<i>My critics are relentless. They're out to destroy me.</i>	In response to threats from an adversary, David wrote, " But You, O Lord , are a shield about me. My glory, and the One who lifts my head" (Ps. 3:3).
<i>Their treatment of me isn't fair. They're sinning against me.</i>	Joseph immersed himself in the sovereignty of God, telling his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).
<i>I've pushed hard for so long that I've depleted my adrenalin and emotional reserves. Now there's little motivation for the daily routine. It's been a long time since I felt this despondent.</i>	Paul could identify: "When we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God , who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (2 Cor. 7:5-6).

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But God . . .

<i>I thought personal purity would get easier with age, but the longer I serve the Lord, the more temptations to sin bombard me. Satan never takes a break in his efforts to derail me. Sometimes I grow weary of the battle and want to give in.</i>	"But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thess. 3:3).
<i>I don't feel qualified for the task God assigned me. My feelings of inadequacy sap my joy. I just don't have what it takes.</i>	In response to critics trying to undermine Paul's ministry in Corinth, he told church members that their conversion to Christ was the evidence of his credibility as an apostle (2 Cor. 3:1-4). Then he shifted the spotlight from himself to the Lord, who had enabled him to succeed. Notice the contrast: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God , who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:5-6).
<i>I put a lot of pressure on myself to succeed. When there's little to show for my efforts, frustration envelops me.</i>	Paul suggested that ministry outcomes aren't our responsibility. When a contentious spirit surfaced in Corinth over allegiance to different leaders, Paul wrote, "I planted, Apollos waters, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

With which need do you most identify right now? Open your Bible to the corresponding passage and read it again in an unhurried manner.

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I've saved the best for last. The capstone of this chapter is a "but" spoken by Jesus to Peter in reference to spiritual warfare. Jesus didn't soft-pedal the inevitability of opposition and struggle for those who serve him. He even intimated that Peter would let him down: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; *but I have prayed for you*, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32, emphasis mine).