



Near and Now

When My Calling Is Exhausting and Produces Burnout – Jeremiah

By Linnea Peterson

Warm-up Question

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “between a rock and a hard place”?

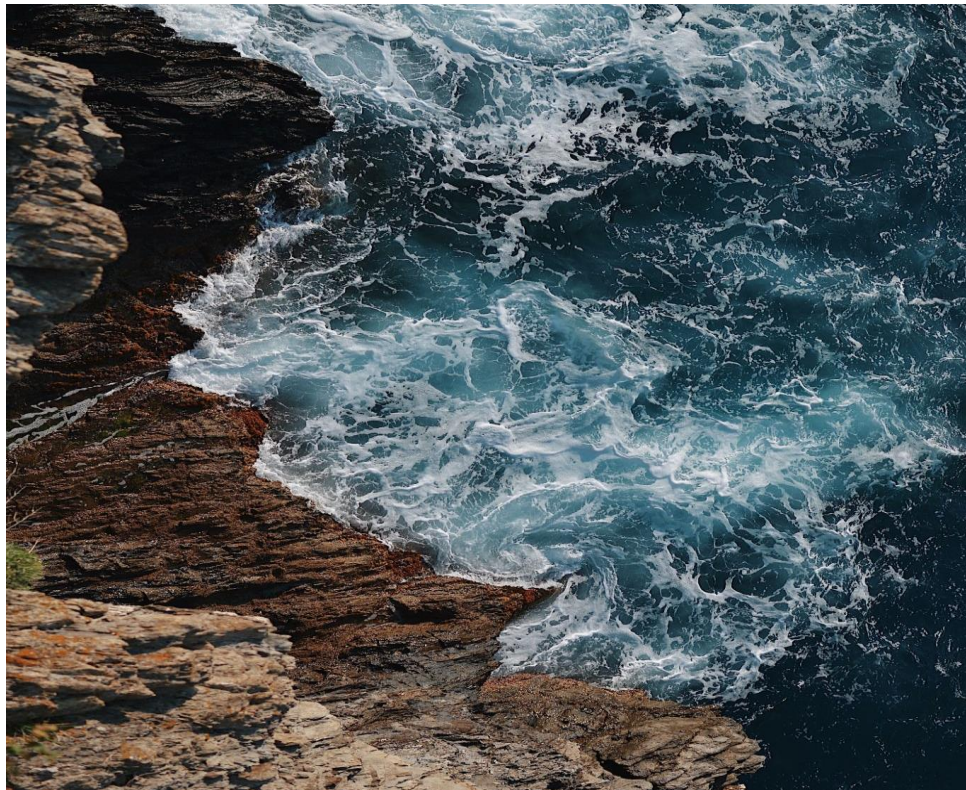


Photo by Mihai Fischer on [Unsplash](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

I am weary

Read [Jeremiah 20:7-18](#).

Bible Story Reflection

In this passage, Jeremiah is obviously suffering. He's exhausted, his friends have turned on him, and he wishes he had never been born. What's easy to miss, though, is the source of Jeremiah's weariness: "I am weary with holding it in" (Jeremiah 20:9). The thing Jeremiah is holding in is God's message, which Jeremiah, as a prophet, is bound to proclaim.

Since holding God's message in is so difficult, shouldn't Jeremiah just let it out? It turns out that prophesying has its own downsides, seen in the previous verse: "For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long" (Jeremiah 20:8). People don't want to hear the message God has sent Jeremiah to proclaim, to the point where they want revenge on Jeremiah and are making him miserable.

This leaves Jeremiah between a rock and a hard place. Neither prophesying nor refusing to prophesy will make him happy or comfortable. At church, we often hear truisms about how the role of a prophet is difficult, but the reality is that many of us find ourselves in difficult situations where every available option has substantial downsides. Perhaps you believe deeply in your vocation but find that it takes more from you than you can sustainably give. Perhaps the job that will support your family is not a job that you feel good or even neutral about ethically. Perhaps it is difficult to find alignment between what you're good at and what actually interests you. Often, there are no easy answers--but it might be comforting to know that you're not the first person to find yourself between a rock and a hard place, and that finding yourself there in no way negates your faith or God's presence in your life.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt caught between a rock and a hard place? If you're no longer in that situation, how did it get resolved? Were all of the options as bad as they seemed?
2. Have you ever had to deliver an inconvenient message or felt the need to speak truth to power? How did that go?
3. On the flip side, have you ever been the recipient of a message that you resented but came to realize was true? How did you react in the moment? Do you wish you'd reacted differently?
4. Do you believe it's possible to have a vocation that matters and also allows you to have balance in your life? Do you have different answers regarding whether it's possible in general and whether it's possible for you in particular?
5. Have you ever found a previously unseen option that resolved a dilemma better than any of the initially obvious options would have? How did you break out of your initial thought pattern to find this option?
6. Do you think some vocations simply make it impossible for anyone engaged in them to be happy? Do you think that work still needs doing? If so, who should do it?

Activity Suggestions

Alongside today's reading, another ancient story about a person caught between a rock and a hard place comes from Greek mythology, which told of seafarers getting caught between the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis. Look up art of Scylla and Charybdis and then draw or paint your own.

Play a game where one person sits or stands in the middle of the room and tells people to move to one corner if they like one activity (say, watching TV) and to another corner if they like another activity (say, going for walks). Encourage people who like neither or both to choose "door number three" and move to a third corner. Practice this several times to demonstrate that there are often more than two possible options in many situations.

Prayer Concerns

People who speak truth to power, people whose vocations are exhausting, and anyone who feels stuck between a rock and a hard place

Closing Prayer

Your call can be a heavy burden, O God. Give me space to lament, and restore my trust in you. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

