

God's Word to the Weary, Discouraged, and Ambitious (Jeremiah 45)

Big Idea: Life is hard, but God cares. Things might get worse, but it's not about us. It's about God.

Alan Noble has written a book recently called [*On Getting Out of Bed: The Burden and Gift of Living*](#). Noble argues that normal life involves a great deal of suffering. "Tremendous suffering is the normal experience of being in this world. Beauty and love and joy are normal, too, but so is suffering."

He says what many of us have felt: sometimes, getting out of bed in the morning can be incredibly hard. That may sound incredibly pessimistic for some of you, but for others, it's where you live right now. We will all go through times in our lives when we feel weary and discouraged.

The story we just read is about a man who had every reason to feel this way.

The Scene

We're going through the Bible this year. Right now we're at perhaps the darkest point in the history of God's people in the Hebrew Scriptures. We're in the book of Jeremiah, prophet to the stubborn people of Judah. Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet

because he had a difficult message to deliver. God was going to bring judgment on the next generation in Judah for their wickedness.

In chapter 39, Jeremiah describes the complete destruction of Jerusalem. The city was besieged for months. Finally, it was captured and destroyed. The Temple – where God dwelt among his people – was razed to the ground. The king's house was torn down. So were the walls of the city. Many of the inhabitants were either killed or taken into captivity. It was a complete and utter catastrophe.

Mark this date down: 586 BC. Memorize it. It's one of the most important dates in the Old Testament. It's the year the Babylonian captivity began. It's the year that the dream died.

These were not good times. These were the worst times. It seemed like God had completely abandoned his people.

The chapter we just read zooms in not on Jeremiah, but on his scribe Baruch. Baruch is an interesting person in the Bible. He's a professional scribe, a literate person in an illiterate world. He would have been a bit of a big deal.

Trusted and admired, they got a key to the executive washroom. They parked their chariot close to the office. They had the number for the company membership at the Jerusalem City Club. They were on the inside. (Joel Gregory)

Tradition says that he may have even been a royal scribe. The ancient historian Josephus says that he came from a distinguished family. His impression has been found among seals belonging to royal officials.

Baruch is the only person in the Bible for whom we may have fingerprints. In 1975, a team of archaeologists acquired clay document markers – kind of like ancient bookmarks – from an Arab antiquities dealer. In 1986, they finally managed to decipher these markers. They found one that had the seal of Baruch, son of Neriah. Later, they

discovered another marker that not only contained Baruch's seal but also a thumbprint, likely belonging to the scribe himself. This is a real man, just like us.

So you have this man who seems to be quite important. In Jeremiah, you see him writing down Jeremiah's prophecies. It was hard work. And it was a difficult time to be alive. Jerusalem had fallen some 19 years earlier. They were witnessing God's judgment on his people.

For Baruch it was even worse. In chapter 36, we read that some of Baruch's scrolls, containing Jeremiah's prophecies, had come to the king's attention. Someone read them to the king. In an act of outright rebellion, the king destroyed the scroll as it was read:

It was the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house, and there was a fire burning in the fire pot before him. As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot. (Jeremiah 36:22-23)

He took his penknife and cut God's holy word to pieces. He burned holy Scripture. All that work – the careful dictation of prophecy carefully written down on leather or papyrus, wrapped around wooden rollers – rejected. All of that work – weeks or even months – and all that it meant destroyed.

Baruch lived in a discouraging time. He had a discouraging message. And his work brought discouraging results. He had very little reason to hope. His life may have been in danger because of his message.

It's in this context that we read Baruch's words in verse 3: "Woe is me! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain. I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest" (Jeremiah 45:3).

Baruch had sorrow on top of suffering. He was worn out and could find no respite or escape from his pain. He'd paid the cost of serving God, and he felt the pain.

Can you relate to Baruch? There are times that everything seems to be going wrong, when we have every reason to feel discouraged.

What God Teaches Us

But look at what happens.

First: God notices.

Jeremiah 45:2 says, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch," and then he repeats Baruch's words of complaint.

And here we see: God notices what we're going through. You see this all throughout Scripture. Psalm 34:18 says, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." Think about this. God has a lot going on. He's running the 200 billion galaxies in the universe. Sometimes it seems like our problems are small – like "take a number and wait over there" small. Does God really care about me and my little problems? The Bible screams: yes! God sees. God cares. In fact, God not only comes near to us in our trouble but he saves the crushed in spirit.

Take another verse in the psalms. Psalm 56:8 says, "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" God is not only aware of our tears, but he stores them. It's like when we're crying, God comes with a bottle and collects our tears. They matter to him. He keeps track of our tossing and turning in bed. God really cares.

Baruch had a beef. You know what it's like to have a complaint. I've had a few myself recently, and it's hard to get customer service. It's hard to get anyone to notice you saying, "Hey! I need help over here." But God notices. That's why 1 Peter 5:7 says that you can cast all our anxiety on God because he cares for you.

Are you weary and discouraged? This story tells us that God notices. God knows what you're going through. God really cares.

God cares. Here's the second thing that God teaches us in this passage.

Second: It might get worse.

You might think that God would tell Baruch to practice some self-care. Take a week off. Go to the spa. Or that he would give him some reassurance. God loves you. All things work together for good. Sometimes those things are true. Sometimes we do need to take some time off and get perspective. Sometimes we do need to be reminded of God's promises.

But look at what God says to Baruch in verse 4 and the middle of verse 5: "Thus says the LORD: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up—that is, the whole land ... I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the LORD."

Not exactly encouraging! But this is a necessary word for us. We tend to zero in on what's happening in our lives. It's like we're the hero of the movie and everyone else is a supporting character. But God changes our perspective. He is up to something in the world. He is the hero of the story. What he is up to will affect us, but it's not all about us. He's accomplishing his purposes among the world.

I'm reading Tolkien's Fellowship of the Ring right now, and I love these words. Frodo has the ring, and Gandalf is telling him of the Shadow that has taken shape and is

growing again. "I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. He wanted to live an easy, carefree life. He didn't want to get caught up in events beyond him.

But Gandalf replies:

'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us. And already, Frodo, our time is beginning to look black.'

Baruch is saying, "I wish I didn't have to put up with all of these hardships!" God essentially tells him: you're part of something bigger.

Don't forget the first point. God still cares. But God has a bigger agenda than our comfort. God is working out his purposes in this world. And even though he cares, we may be called upon to suffer not because God doesn't care because he does.

God cares, but things still might get worse. But there's one more thing.

Three: Remember that it's not all about you.

These words are at first deflating but then liberating for us.

And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the LORD. But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go. (Jeremiah 45:5)

Do you want great things for yourself? Sure. Don't we all? We want our names to be big. We want to be big deals. We want to serve God and be seen by others to be great.

Man, I wanted this. I used to dream of doing great things for God, but most of those things also involved me becoming a big deal.

But God tells Baruch: don't aim for the kind of greatness that's about making your name great. Aim for the kind of greatness that's about making God great. Don't base your happiness on how easy your life is or how big your name is. Base your happiness on the greatness of God and the privilege of serving him.

It's what Tim Keller calls [*The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*](#). "The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less."

True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings.

The only way we can think of ourselves less is by thinking of God more. It's by having a bigger view of God, a greater amazement at the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. As God becomes bigger, as the cross looms larger, we are freed to stop seeking great things for ourselves. We'll be content simply by being his servants. That will be enough, because God is enough.

Life is hard, but God cares. Things might get worse, but it's not about us. It's about God. The more we see the beauty of Jesus, the more we'll be freed from making our lives about ourselves. The more we'll experience the freedom of self-forgetfulness.

So Father, give us that bigger view of Jesus. Help us to know you care even when things get hard, and that it really isn't about us. Help us to live lives that are all about you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.