

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Rocks and Hard Places—Exile and the blame game¹

"You made me mess up!" the four-year-old says to her sister as the blocks she carefully placed into a work of art tumbles into a pile of chaos. "What did I do?" her sister shouts back.

It starts young, as though blaming others is in the human DNA — a part of the original plan. Andrea Blundell begins her article on this topic by defining blaming as "the fine art of making others responsible for all the difficult things that happen to us." Sometimes we call it the "blame game."

Psychologists call blaming others a "self-serving bias." Research uncovered that many of us take the credit when things go well, but we prefer to blame others when things don't go well. It's difficult to admit we're wrong, we made a decision that turned out bad, or we simply messed up. Mainly when the consequences are undesirable.²

The Book of Jeremiah's prophecies describes a time when the people of Judah were confronted with the consequences of their choices. They found themselves

with tough choices. Let's say they were between a rock and a hard place. Let me explain.



First, it's essential to distinguish between the people with privilege and power from the poor and marginalized.

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Exceptions (Consequences are not rejection)

As we come to the end of our series, *Daring to hope in an unstable world*, it's fitting to turn our attention to the good news that is the source of our hope. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing hope when we discover that we are frighteningly close to the situation that the Judeans reached during the time of Jeremiah. We, too, can be rejected by God and left to the

We, too, can be rejected by God and left to the consequences of our bad choices.¹



Yet, we dare to hope in an unstable world because we know that often what feels like rejection is

not rejection at all. God allowed the people of Judah to suffer from the consequences of their choices. Faced with an increasing gap between the well-off and the poor in our country, we have similar choices to make. We are also faced with how to dismantle systemic racism amid a resurgence of white supremacy threatening violence

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You must wear a mask while in the area and to enter church office. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.

Thank you & Stay safe Everyone!

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Exceptions (Consequences are not rejection)..cont from page 1

and empowered by political leaders. And the attack on the U.S. Capital illustrated for the world the urgency of our impending confrontation.

This week we explore our feelings of rejection to help us realize that God did not reject the people in Jeremiah's time. God simply allowed them to suffer the consequences of their decisions, which took them to the place that those of us in privilege are uncertain we want to go. They lost their privilege. God always sides with the poor and marginalized. And while open carry laws might intimidate a lot of us, intimidation won't change God's mind.

Linda Graham is a marriage and family therapist. In a recent post on her website, she shared an exercise that helps us to identify how our body responds to the sting of rejection. The exercise goes something like this:

*Allow yourself to sit quietly for a moment, eyes gently closed. When you're ready, imagine yourself walking down the street on the sidewalk, someplace familiar to you. You're fine, humming along, and then across the street walking toward you, but on the other side of the street, you see someone you know, and you wave hello – and they don't wave back. They don't wave back. Stay quiet for a moment. Simply notice what happens inside as you perceive and react to not being seen nor responded to by them.*²

Psychologists call what happens to us "separation distress response." Our brainstem triggers an unconscious response that can quickly escalate into a conscious effort to try and make sense of what just happened. Linda Graham noticed that there is an endemic of "It must be me" in our culture that results in feelings of unworthiness among us.

This separation distress response happens at some of the most inconvenient times. Our fear of triggering this response can cause us to stay with a crowd beyond when we realize that we disagree with what the crowd is doing. Or to support a political leader or party that no longer represents our ideals to avoid rejection by other supporters.

Separation distress response holds us in unhealthy relationships and convinces us that we are the exception to divine grace. We are the rejected. Under such threat, otherwise rational people can conclude that they are sick and tired of feeling like they are the problem. And they rebel, finding justification for responses antithetical to the love stories found in scripture.



★ Coming up this week ★

In Our Prayers

Richard Oram
Kevin Croom
Sylvia Pittman
Shirley Craig



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux
Norma Buzzard Mary Nations

(Pastor Book Club will still be via Zoom until further notice—but will slowly start to meet in person, depending on how the next few weeks will go.... Please call the church office for more info 235-0016)

EVEN THOUGH OUR GOVERNOR HAS OPENED UP BUSINESSES., WE MUST CONTINUE TO WEAR OUR MASKS WHEN COMING INTO THE ASBURY BUILDING, AND USE HAND SANITIZER THAT IS PLACED THROUGHOUT THE BUILDING. THANK YOU AND EVERYONE STAY SAFE!

Pastor Tommy

- Feb 8 Mon
- Feb 9 Tues 10am-2pm
Water / Food Distribution
- Feb 10 Wed Pastor Book Club
South Flint Soup Kitchen
Food Giveaway 11am to 12Noon
- Feb 11 Thu
- Feb 12 Fri
- Feb 13 Sat
- Feb 14 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

Join worship online
Sunday, February 7th—10:30am

Facebook Live or Webinar 

Join by Phone
+1 929 436 2866

Meeting ID: 324 841 204

Join online
[HTTPS://ZOOM.US/J/324841204](https://zoom.us/j/324841204)

Asbury Worship Series Bridges Coming February 17th

The image should be familiar. It's the same one from our January series, *Daring to Hope in an unstable world*.

The image stays with us because a lot of us accepted the

the challenge. We're daring to hope despite the anxiety we're feeling from the threats that surround us.

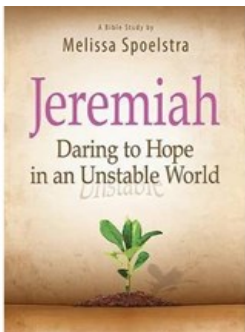
The Speaker of the House recently named the source of at least one of the threats as coming from within. In the case of Congress, the Speaker was referring to members of Congress threatening other legislatures.



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Book Club News

We complete our discussion of the book and videos by Adam



Hamilton, *Incarnation*. Our group utilized the study group videos available on a new resource that is available

to all of us called Amplify. This library of study materials is accessible online. More information will be coming if you want to start your own study group or do some learning on your own.

This month our attention turns to Hope. But we realize that hope can be harder to hold onto when there is so much turmoil. The availability of a vaccine offers hope that life will eventually return to some form of normal. But there continues to be a lot of reasons to feel dismayed.

In January our group will take a deeper dive into the Book of Jeremiah. We plan to use a book written by the wife of an Ohio pastor, Melissa Spoelstra. The title of her book is *Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*.

Each week we watch a video featuring the author as she takes us through Jeremiah, not page by page, but theme by theme. Join our meeting via Zoom if possible so that you are able to watch the video. If you call in by phone, you should be able to hear the audio well enough to participate in the discussion that follows.

I encourage you to join online for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others are saying by calling (929) 436-2866, and entering the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium	Welcome Team
Anthony, Jim	Ushers
Jonathon, Terrance	Production Team
Miriam	Children
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Christine & Norma	Cafe

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel	Pastor
Connie Portillo	Office Secretary
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Dir. Operations

Matt DePalma	Farm Manager
Kevin Croom	Farm Operations
Israel Unger	Function to Funding
Kim Sims	Connections
Karl Collyer	Production
Katelin Maylum	
South Flint Soup Kitchen/Production	

Asbury Café

Plan to meet outside the sanctuary each Sunday before worship for coffee, tea, snacks, conversation and so on. The music will start when it is time to wrap up and head in for worship.

We are a diverse group and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

Bridges (Coming February 17th)... Asbury Worship Series

But the threat from within also includes the church that we hold dear. The domestic terrorists that stormed the U.S. Capital did so, they claim, because the violence they perpetrated was God's will. They claim a version of the truth offered to them by false prophets claiming biblical authority. But their truth contradicts the trajectory of the biblical narrative. The threat is from within.

Bridges is a series about "pursuing God's heart for racial reconciliation." But let's be clear. Race is a human construct created for the purpose of creating a social, economic, and even religious hierarchy. Reconciliation begins with recognizing the raw truth that humans are fond of creating our own sense of the truth.¹

Our current series is based on the prophecies of Jeremiah. By January 31 our message reaches a startling conclusion. We are the people of Judah. Our denial and blaming others for our own failings is coming to a predictable conclusion. God is confronting our nation. Surrender to exile by giving up privilege and power. Share our resources with our neighbors. Rebuild systems that perpetrate injustice. Take care of God's planet.

God is merciful. The stories found in scripture offer testimony that God insists on love. God demands love first and foremost towards the One True God and no others. But loving God requires that we love one another, our planet, and ourselves. So reconciliation is a process that frees us in all four directions.

Our book club concludes our study of Melissa Spoelstra's book, *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*, in a couple of weeks.² We plan to read and study Latasha Morrison's book as part of our celebration of the Easter Season that we sometimes call Lent. It is a time of reflection, repentance, and reconciliation. Plan to join us each Wednesday at 12 Noon either in the main meeting room (Library) or online.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We plan to be live on both Facebook and YouTube. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](http://www.FlintAsbury.org) at [FlintAsbury.org](http://www.FlintAsbury.org). And especially, I look forward to being with you, wherever you are, on Christmas Eve at 6 pm.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*. Yates & Yates and Penguin Random House, 2019.

² Melissa Spoelstra. *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*. © 2014. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Rocks and Hard Places—Exile and the blame game¹ ... *cont. from pg 1*

While no one group of people had a monopoly on bad decisions, this story's focus is on the people who knew better and had the power to make better choices. And God, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah made this abundantly clear.

The nation of Judah were descendants of tribes first chosen by God to be an example of why we should all want to live according to God's plan for humanity. But somewhere along the way, their priorities shifted towards, shall we say, a "self-serving bias." The idea that all people are of value and putting others' needs ahead of their own was replaced with an "everyone for themselves" and "I matter more than you" approach. And their day of reckoning was coming near.

Historically, God's covenant with their ancestors meant that they enjoyed divine protection. Somehow things nearly always worked out for them. They prospered, and their nation was the envy of the world. But during Jeremiah's time, this was no longer the case. And the latest bully on the block had plans to take over. It was clear that should Judea's enemy, the Babylonians, attack them, Judah's people were on their own. God was on the side of their enemy in the impending battle.

God pleaded with the people through Jeremiah and other preachers, priests, and prophets to change their ways. But they refused. God warned them that Babylonia would soon attack and prevail. And their only choice at that point was to surrender. Let's call this their hard place.

The leaders had two choices. They could have turned back to God and lived by the covenant that God offered. I'm calling this choice their rock for a couple of reasons. First, God is immovable, permanent, and insistent on God's way. For some reason, their knowledge, wealth, and power were more important to them. The idea of giving up their privilege and sharing with the poor was apparently too much for them.

But if they surrendered to the Babylonians, they would lose their power and privilege anyway. The Babylonian military would take them away into exile. And God warned them through Jeremiah that exile would last a long time. But God also promised that exile would eventually end and God would welcome them back into covenant.



The people of privilege found themselves between a rock and a hard place, given their two choices. So they did what any four-year-old learns how to do. They blamed everyone but themselves. They blamed the victims. If only they were smarter, worked harder, they could have more. They denied that systemic racism was real, despite the apparent facts of the case. They created their own version of the truth that kept them in power while marginalizing others.

So those at the top who had the most power and the most to give up took a third option. They would fight to hold onto power despite Jeremiah's warning from God that they would not prevail. And history proved Jeremiah's prophecy was correct. Those at the very top perished at the hands of the Babylonians. Those with knowledge, wealth, and privilege lost what they had, except their knowledge, and went into exile.



Asbury Farms offers fresh produce every week!

Go to our website, FlintAsbury.org to place your order for a Veggie Box, or sign up for a subscription. You can also call our office at 810-235-0016 to place your order. We accept EBT and Double-up Bucks for a limited time only!!!

Call By Noon on Wednesday for Thursday delivery.

Life groups question & notes

the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

For I know the plans I have for you," says

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Jeremiah 29:11. Do you see plans unfolding for our community? If so, share what you are seeing with your group. Compare what you see with each other. What are some of the similarities and differences? Why do you suppose there are differences in what you see or don't see?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Exceptions*. Follow the exercise suggested by Linda Graham. Were you able to detect how your body responded to the exercise? Are these familiar feelings that you associate with rejection? When you realize that your source of pain comes from your own choices do you still turn to God and ask for relief? What does it mean to you that God never rejects any of us?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.



FEBRUARY—FOOD GIVEAWAY DATES
SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN

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South Flint Soup Kitchen will be having their Food Giveaways on February 10th and February 24th from 11am to 12Noon. No need to sign up! Stop at the Vermilya Avenue side of the building and say you want food from our Pantry. **ALL ARE WELCOME, BUT PLEASE WEAR YOUR MASKS!**



FOOD GIVEAWAYS

3410 Fenton Road

Flint MI 48507

3 Blocks North of Atherton Road

Phone: 810-239-3427

Email:

southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

The Babylonians left the poor and marginalized to enjoy whatever was left behind by those going into exile or stolen by the invaders. We don't learn a lot about this group except that they weren't being punished. They were the victims, and God would find some other way to care for them. But they also didn't get to write the story. But that's a topic for another day.

This is the issue, isn't it? As a nation, we find ourselves roughly in the same place as the people of Judah did centuries ago. We finally removed a person willing to do anything to hold onto power. Still, we're left with other leaders willing to keep looking for that third option. I'm not trying to name our Babylon, but there are plenty of threats to keep us on edge. And an invisible virus seems to be holding most of the power as of late.

We're left with two choices where life continues. Those of us with knowledge and the privilege of making choices can surrender to exile. We can do this knowing that exile is temporary. But this means giving up our privilege. But we can hold onto our knowledge. Eventually, we end up back at the rock.

We can choose the rock now. We can surrender our privilege and anything else that sits between the God who created us and us. Last week, our topic was a heart change. We can surrender to the Spirit of God in anticipation of a heart change.

We don't have to go somewhere else to exile. As long as we are living apart from God, we're already in exile. Eventually, we learn that there is only one choice if we want to live. And that's the immovable, permanent, and eternal Rock of Salvation.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday at 10:30 am as we learn together from the successes and mistakes of Jeremiah's community. Invite your friends to join us online or in-person.

Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches, boast in this alone; that they truly know me...

Jeremiah 9:23-24

We have a new button on the homepage of our [website](#) - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to a viewer to allow you to join live or watch later in the week. We're also live on [Facebook](#) and our newly launched [YouTube channel](#). You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at [FlintAsbury.org](#). A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the *Circuit Rider* each week. You can request this publication by email.

Send a request to info@FlintAsbury.org or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#).

We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

¹ [Some of the content for our series comes from Melissa Spoelstra. *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*. © 2014. Nashville: Abingdon Press.](#)

² Andrea Blundell, "Why We Put the Blame On Others – and the Real Cost We Pay," © Harley Therapy Counseling Blog, September 10, 2015.

Sadly, there is pain in the world. And while much of our pain comes from disease and accidents, most of our pain comes from our decisions. We know that there is a connection between forest fires and climate change. We know that a virus spreads when given an opportunity. The people of Judea suffered because they turned to leaders and the machinery of war for their liberation. We, likewise, suffer for many of the same reasons. Pain seeks us out when we depend on human motivation and creativity alone.

British novelist C. S. Lewis wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." Pain gets our attention. Lewis referred to pain as God's megaphone. When the world isn't listening, pain stops us in our tracks and grabs our attention. And if we turn our attention to God, we learn how best to manage within the quagmire we created.

Most of us suffer rejection more than once during our formative years. And these experiences, unless they are paired with contradictory experiences of love and acceptance, can dominate our response to totally different circumstances. The neural pathways in our brain

may be stuck in a one-way superhighway that takes us to hopelessness. These pathways lead us to conclude, "It must be me." When we visit this place often enough, messages of hope are shouted down by our other inner voices.

After the Judeans were taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote a letter that shared God's message of hope. "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). This declaration by God to the people of Judah can be our declaration of hope as well.

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

We dare to hope in an unstable world because we know that God holds our hand during our pain. And while good plans work best when they become tangible, we know that God calls you and me to turn good plans into reality.

The source of our hope lies in the recognition that God loved us enough to live among people. And this love is a gift. We don't earn it, and we can never be the exception that misses out. Unless we choose otherwise.

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Pastor Tommy

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² Linda Graham. "The Neurobiology of Feeling Unlovable," © Linda Graham-MFT.net.

