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Recently I read an article about the millions of people who quietly mutter, “I can’t do this anymore,” those who feel frustrated with the way things are. The article said,

As they commuted to work, performed household tasks, sat around with family and friends, engaged in hobbies, or watched television, each of the 320 million residents of the United States reportedly acknowledged to themselves that they simply could not continue doing any of this, not for a single moment...

“I can’t keep doing this,” each person in the country reportedly thought while shopping for groceries, replying to emails, sitting through meetings, walking to or from their parking spot, or tucking their children into bed. “Things can’t go on like this. They just can’t.”¹

Have you ever found yourself thinking that—feeling frustrated with the way things are, feeling as though you just can’t put up with it anymore? Maybe it’s the commercialism that especially begins to invade our homes at this time of year, telling us that the good news of the approaching season has more to do with consumerism than God’s entrance into the world as a small baby. Maybe it’s the

political system that has allowed bickering and lying in order to attract votes. Maybe you’re frustrated with your job and feel as though you just can’t attend one more day on the job. Or maybe you see the pain in the faces of those who are homeless in our community and feel you can’t do anything about it.

We may each have a different “it” that we can’t put up with anymore, a different “can’t” that we don’t want to face. But sometimes life presents us with obstacles that we have to overcome, as was the case with

Luis and his 12-year-old son along with Dulce María and her 7-year-old daughter, Walter, 40 years old, and Anael, 25, all from Tegucigalpa, [who] travel together. Dulce María shared, “I bought and sold cucumbers, but many times, they do not sell and spoil. My grandmother raised me. She is the only family. I have three daughters, and I only have to see them. I’m leaving my land because I want to help my grandmother. My two girls, 12 and 9, stayed with the grandmother, I brought the seven-year-old.” Between tears and sobs, Dulce María [said], “I have to support my grandmother and to take my girls forward. One day thieves

entered my little house with a broken roof, where there is no rubber to prevent water from entering, and stole the TV and my towels. I want a better life.” Walter shared, “I sell toy trumpets in the street. Selling is difficult, and one gets anxious when your spouse is asking for milk for your daughter and there is no money to buy it.”²

This is just one of the many stories that our Global Ministry Partners tell us about those who have joined a caravan to escape their homes of danger for a safer place to live. Some have finally said, “We just can’t do this anymore in our homeland. We need a safe place to raise our family.”

Here in our nation, some have replied, “We can’t let people come here anymore,” while others have said, “We can’t ignore their cries of help.” Both groups of “can’ts” line up with their arguments, dividing our nation, leaving us all feeling overwhelmed and confused, getting us stuck in the land of “can’ts.”

That’s a problem that the prophet Jeremiah also faced—living in a land of “can’ts.” The Babylonians had invaded the land where Jeremiah and his friends and family lived. The invaders dragged

many people kicking and screaming from their homes, creating chaos and fear in the lives of those who remained behind. Many were ruthlessly killed as part of the process of taking over control of the nation.

In the midst of all the chaos, Jeremiah sensed God speaking to him, “Before you were born, Jeremiah, I blessed you to be a spokesperson for me to all the nations.” Here the Hebrew language uses the word *goyim*, translated as “nations,” which often referred to those who were the outsiders, those who did not follow the religious ways of Jeremiah’s people.

As one might expect, Jeremiah objected to this idea. “Excuse me, God, but I’m not very old. I don’t have much experience. I’m not a very good speaker. I think you’ve got the wrong guy. I can’t.”

Jeremiah entered the land of “can’ts.” I can’t since I’m just a young person. I can’t speak very well. Maybe you have me mixed up with someone else, for I can’t do it. Possibly your list of people born on the same day as I was born has somehow gotten mixed up, for I can’t do what you’re asking.

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How could I speak to the *goyim*, the nations oppressing us? How could I even bring any words to my own people about what's happening? I can't.

That could have been the end of the conversation, but God didn't give up. God explained to Jeremiah, "I can't? NOT! Don't say 'I can't.' Do not say 'I'm too young.' I have chosen you to go and speak for me. Don't be afraid, for I am with you."

Then it felt to Jeremiah as though God touched his mouth as he heard God whisper in his ear, "I have put my words in your mouth—words that will pluck up and tear down, words to take apart and destroy, words for building and planting."

I don't know about you, but I think I would still have responded, "I can't. It sounds too overwhelming. You've got the wrong person. Besides...what do you mean you selected me before I was born to be a spokesperson? Don't I get a choice in my life? What about free will?"

I imagine God's reply, "Of course you get a choice. You can reject my invitation, but while your DNA was being knit together in your mother's womb, I could see your strengths and gifts. I could

see how your chromosomes were coming together to make you who you are. Based on what I saw forming, I knew you could speak for me today. I didn't see you forming as an NBA athlete, for your DNA didn't gift you the gift of athletics. I didn't ask you to be a doctor to make the world a better place, for I could see that was not your gift. I could have asked you to be a master chef to make the world tastier, but that's who you are. You're created to speak for those who need a vision of hope."

As Jeremiah stood in the gate of the temple, God invited him to bring a word of hope to the people: to change their ways and act justly to one another. God said, "Clean up your act and treat one another with kindness, stop oppressing the immigrants and the orphans and the widows—those living on the streets. Then I will live among you. Don't use your place of worship as a place to hide and pretend everything is ok, go out into the world and care for those in need."

Sometimes we may find the problems around us so overwhelming that we enter into the land of "I

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can't." We may feel like the little girl, Ellen, who went with her mother

to a movie for her birthday. As [they] left the theater, while [her mother] was bundling up Ellen against the cold wind, [someone] asked her how old she was. "I can't tell you," Ellen said. "I have my mittens on!"³

There may be days when we feel as though we have our mittens on, when we say "I can't" in response to the great needs around us. Sometimes we may not even see the gifts that God has woven into us through our DNA, but no matter what your skills or talents may be, God is with each one of you, inviting you to make the world a better place.

We have a choice. We could leave on our mittens. We could hide in our sanctuary. We could stay home and shut out the world. But that would

be a terrible waste of what we have been created to be. Maybe you're a musician, or a great cook, or retired. Maybe you teach or protect our nation or community. Maybe you build or repair or paint or clean homes. Maybe you listen to those living on the streets or care for foster children or work in a nursing home or hospital.

Regardless of how you're put together, God invites you to make the world a better place for those around you. And even on the days when your tongue feels tied or your hands covered with mittens, God is with you, nudging you to use the gifts you have received. And on those days when you may step into the land of "I can't," God replies NOT and gives you the courage to be who you have been created to be.

¹ "I Can't Do This Anymore,' Think 320 Million Americans Quietly Going About Day," 8/17/16, www.theonion.com/i-cant-do-this-anymore-think-320-million-americans-1819579152.

² Richard Mayol, "The Migrant Caravan from Central America," 10/23/18, www.globalministries.org/the_migrant_caravan.

³ Hodgins, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for*

Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (Kindle Locations 793-795). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 21.