During his prophetic career, Jeremiah encountered frequent opposition from priests and false prophets calling for his execution (Jeremiah 26:11), officials throwing him into a cistern to die (Jeremiah 38:6), a temple officer beating him and putting him in stocks (Jeremiah 20:2), another prophet charging him with false prophesying (Jeremiah 28:5-9), people accusing him of madness and treachery (Jeremiah 29:26-27), and still others rejecting him outright (Jeremiah 43:1-7; 44:16-19). Through it all, Jeremiah stood firm, speaking God’s truth to those who needed to hear it, colliding with and confronting those who opposed God.

Collision and confrontation may be appropriate ways to handle certain people and situations. When we encounter people who hold views contrary to what we perceive as morally right or Christ-like, we must not be afraid to collide or confront. When we see injustice, we must be ready to collide with those perpetrating the wrong and confront it by speaking truth to power.

But…but…we need to hear that claim with a large dose of caution. Collision and confrontation can easily wound unnecessarily. In the realm of our national politics, collision and confrontation are often the standard way of doing businessregardless of the consequences or collateral damage. Some Christian churches and groups are known more for what they stand *against* than what they stand *for*, colliding and confronting with those who differ without any Christ-like compassion. Such aggressive approaches can leave people battered and wounded, causing more harm than good.

And yet, there are times when a confrontational word of truth can be a saving word, and a collision course can be a needed wake-up call. A classic example is when a person whose unacknowledged addiction is ruining his life or injuring her relationships. To move toward recovery, that person may need to be confronted by friends to face the addiction and get help, a collision tactic often called “an intervention.”

Other examples of such “holy collisions” may be when we confront a friend who makes snide remarks about a person whose struggle he does not understand, or when we challenge someone about her bullying a weaker person. A more positive example might be when we encourage a disheartened person not to give up but to keep doing the hard-but-right thing. These examples, when undertaken with care, can occur without leaving victims bleeding on the road. We have the choice to use our words and our actions to pluck up, to pull down, to destroy and overthrow, or to speak and do things that build up and plant. Just remember that collision and confrontation, although necessary, will not win you many popularity points.

When Olivia Bardo saw the movie *Wicked,* she noticed striking similarities between Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, and the prophets in the Bible. “Prophets, by nature of their calling, are not well-liked. They must tell a community or nation what they’re doing wrong. In biblical times, modern times, and Ozian times, people don’t like to be told that they need to change their ways. So, when Elphaba…is called to disrupt the oppression that many have become complacent with, she is rejected for it.”

When Elphaba arrives at Shiz University, her magical abilities and green skin capture attention, making her an outlier. This makes it easier for her to recognize others who are marginalized, human and non-human alike. Elphaba learns that the Ozians face a drought, which they blame on the animal population. As the oppressed animals lose their ability to speak and begin to disappear, Elphaba discovers that the campaign against the animals is being orchestrated by the Wizard of Oz himself.

Elphaba confronts the Wizard, declaring she will dismantle the oppression that he inflicts upon the animals. The headmistress, Madame Morrible, calls Elphaba a wicked witch, warning the Ozians that she is a troublemaker. “The best way to bring people together is to give them a good enemy,” the Wizard says. When the Wizard sends his people to capture her, Elphaba boldly responds, “It’s the Wizard who should be afraid of me.” While Elphaba does not ultimately dismantle the Wizard's regime or restore all things to their rightful state, she does expose the Wizard's manipulation and stands against his tyranny.

To stand up to injustice is an example of how confrontational truth can be helpful, but I repeat, we must exercise caution in our collisions. It may be that the person with whom we collide may not be ready or have enough emotional strength to be confronted with our candor. Honesty might be the best policy but applied too forcefully, it can overwhelm another person.

What’s more, the truth we think we possess may not be the truth that is helpful to the other person. In the incident from the *Collision* series where Canwell forced Tolin to hear about his need for forgiveness, Canwell ran all over Tolin’s inability to think beyond his personal pain and guilt. One problem with choosing a collision course is that we may operate by our assumptions rather than our best understanding, which is to say that our perception about why a person is speaking or behaving as they are may not be the actual reason at all.

For our collisions to be holy ones, we must exercise sensitivity and remember what Jesus said about loving our neighbor as our self. As Walter Brueggemann explains: “The cross is the assurance that effective prophetic criticism is done not by an outsider but always by one who must embrace the grief, enter into the death, and know the pain of the criticized one.” Jesus was effective because he confronted the cause, not the person. Jesus took upon himself our pains and sorrows and sins, overpowering them and reconciling us to God. When we can step into another person’s pain or grief or injustice and confront the cause of their dis-ease, then we may collide in a way that is both healthy and holy.

U.S. Representative John Lewis was the son of a sharecropper who grew up in rural Alabama. He said that as a little boy he lived in constant fear because of signs that said, “no colored boys.” His parents told him, “Don’t get in trouble.” Yet, as a young man Lewis was inspired to activism by the Montgomery Bus Boycott that started when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. At the Library of Congress exhibit honoring Parks, Representative Lewis spoke. “Rosa Parks inspired us to get in trouble. And I’ve been getting in trouble ever since,” he said. “She inspired us to find a way, to get in the way, to get in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble.”

Holy collisions that confront destructive issues and build up individuals are good trouble, and good trouble is the task of the modern church, says Brian Zahnd. “Once we untether Jesus from the interests of empire, we begin to see just how countercultural and radical Jesus’ ideas actually are. Enemies? Love them. Violence? Renounce it. Money? Share it. Foreigners? Welcome them. Sinners? Forgive them. These are the kind of radical ideas that will always be opposed by the principalities and powers, but which the followers of Jesus are called to embrace, announce, and enact.” The degree to which the church is authentic to Jesus and his radical ideas is the degree to which the church embodies a true, life-giving faith. May our calling as disciples of Jesus put us on a collision course with the wrongs of the world on behalf of the people of the world.

Prayer: Great and Gracious God, you chose me to serve you, and you appointed me to do good works for you, prepared for me even before I was born. Lord, I am sometimes overwhelmed by this truth. Help me to bear the fruit that I need to bear. Empower me to accomplish the jobs that you prepared for me to do. Encourage me to get into good trouble. May my light always shine bright for you and to others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Sources:**

* Bardo, Olivia, “In ‘Wicked’ and the Bible, Prophets Are Scorned for Truth-Telling,” *Sojourners*, December 19, 2024.

<https://sojo.net/articles/culture/wicked-and-bible-prophets-are-scorned-truth-telling>. Retrieved March 5, 2025.

* Bruggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Fortress Press. © 2001.
* Hayden, Carla D. “Remembering John Lewis: The Power of ‘Good Trouble,’” *Library of Congress website*, July 19, 2020.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2020/07/remembering-john-lewis-the-power-of-good-trouble/>. Retrieved March 6, 2025.

* Kennedy, Eugene C. “Murderous Truth,” in his book, *The Pain of Being Human* (Image Books, 1974), pp. 140-142.
* Zahnd, Brian. *Postcards from Babylon: The Church in American Exile*(Spello Press, 2019).

**Collision Course**

Sunday, August 24, 2025 [Jeremiah 1:4-10](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+1%3a4-10&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

*Collision* (2009) is a five-part British drama that follows a group of strangers whose fates overlap following a deadly multi-vehicle crash. When a lawsuit is filed against the police, Inspector John Tolin is assigned to discover if a high-speed police chase contributed to the pileup. Coincidentally, Tolin is newly returned to duty following the death of his wife and the crippling of his daughter in a crash caused by a drunken driver. Tolin was not in the car with his family at the time of the accident; he was with another woman. After the crash, a guilt-ridden Tolin ends the affair and devotes himself to care for his daughter, Jodie.

Tolin’s guilt is more backstory than main narrative, but it surfaces dramatically when the drunken driver, Harry Canwell, is released from prison. Canwell is a changed man, having given his life to Jesus while in prison, and he writes Tolin asking for forgiveness. When Tolin fails to respond, Canwell tracks him down and tells Tolin about his conversion and need for Tolin’s forgiveness. Tolin, not yet able to forgive, explodes and starts beating Canwell, ceasing only when Jodie wheels herself to the doorway and begs him to stop. Canwell wisely retreats, but we get the sense that he is not going to find any peace until he gets the forgiveness from Tolin for which he hungers. The series is aptly named: in addition to the vehicular collisions, there is the collision between Tolin and Canwell; each set of crashes leaves people damaged, physically and emotionally.

In our text, the prophet Jeremiah tells of his commissioning from God. When Jeremiah protested that he is both unworthy and unqualified to speak for God, the Lord touched his mouth and said, “Now I have put *my* words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). Imagine having the very words of God to speak, and by those words to hold sway over nations and kingdoms! It’s an awesome and daunting undertaking because speaking God’s words does not always make you very popular.

When God commissioned Jeremiah to be God’s spokesperson, God set the prophet on a collision course with his fellow Judeans and their leaders. Jeremiah’s neighbors were far from living faithfully according to the divine covenant and far from trusting their lives to God. So, God appointed Jeremiah “over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” None of this would be accomplished without head-on collisions with those in power and not without deliberate confrontation with indifferent people.