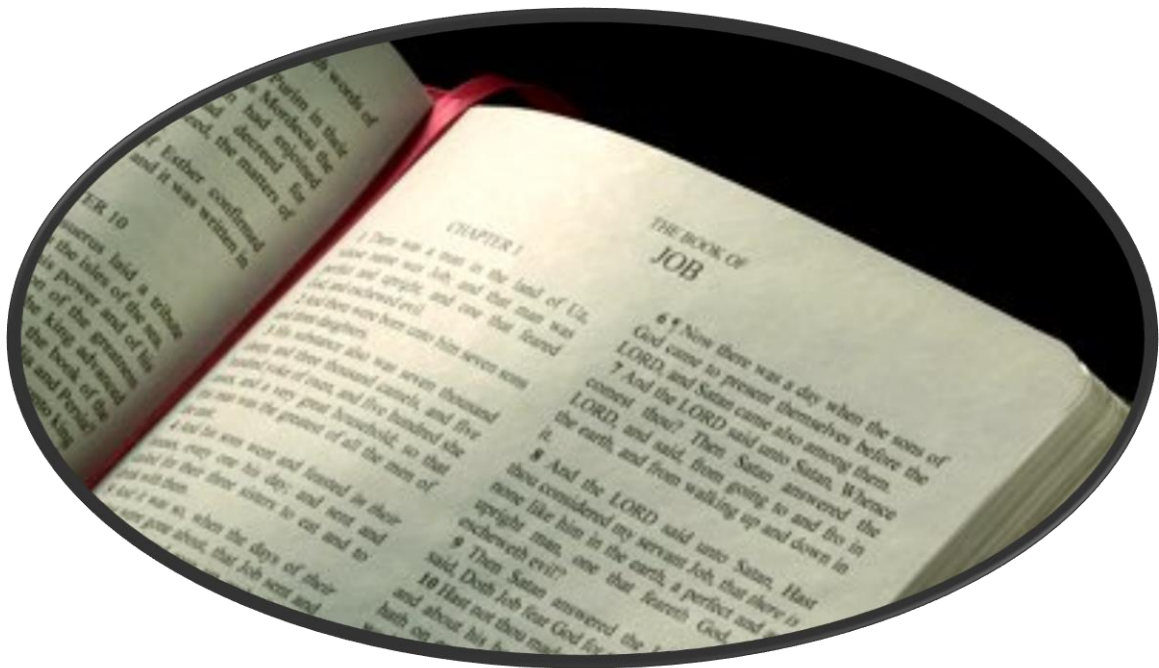


JOB

A TALE OF TWO PERSPECTIVES



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Job 5:8-8:22: A Tale of Two Perspectives

Job's friends "encourage" Job by arguing that God is always just, thus accusing Job of major sin.

Job counters the accusation, and also notes that they're not exactly comforting him.

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Thank you.

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1 Job 5:8-27 (ESV)

“As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night. But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.

“Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal. He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the beasts of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is at peace, and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing. You shall know also that your offspring shall be many, and your descendants as the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheaf gathered up in its season. Behold, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear, and know it for your good.”

Parts of this passage would make a pretty good hymn.

“As for me, I would seek God.”

“He gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the field.”

“He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you.”

Eliphaz’s theology does have some flaws, but that’s not the problem here. His words could be useful – in another place and time.

But right now Job needs this like a hole in the head. The comfort Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are giving to Job isn’t comforting – and it’s going to get worse. This is the nicest thing Job will hear from these guys. Their message will get so harsh that it’ll constitute a third trial.

And this one will prove decisive.

Eliphaz has made a common mistake – he didn’t think through whether he’s about to do more harm than good. We all know that we should think before we speak, but about what? Think about the case for remaining silent.

This is like the classic trick for improving your grocery shopping. Just before checking out, put back 10% of the items in your cart. We need to do something like that with our speech.

But more importantly, by hesitating we open the door to hearing the Holy Spirit. That’s where the real problem is anyway. Eliphaz’s words sound good – to Eliphaz. They sound good to us too.

But Eliphaz has little chance of knowing how they sound to Job.

Only the Holy Spirit can help with that.

2 Job 6:1-13 (ESV)

Then Job answered and said:

“Oh that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words have been rash. For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me. Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass, or the ox low over his fodder? Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the juice of the mallow? My appetite refuses to touch them; they are as food that is loathsome to me.

“Oh that I might have my request, and that God would fulfill my hope, that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off! This would be my comfort; I would even exult in pain unsparing, for I have not denied the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze? Have I any help in me, when resource is driven from me?

When Job says, “*For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me,*” he sounds like David in Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. (ESV)

He knows this isn’t just random bad luck; he understands who is the first cause of all things. But his patience has expired and he actually wants God to end his life. “*Oh that I might have my request, and that God would fulfill my hope, that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off! This would be my comfort; I would even exult in pain unsparing, for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.*”

If he could just die now, his pain would end and he would have succeeded in enduring his trials to completion without sinning against God. Then he could rest in peace.

But God has other plans.

This passage sounds like a prayer. If it is a prayer, it’s a prayer of lamentation with a request for God to end his life. That’s pretty strong stuff, but is it wrong?

The Bible has many lamentations – a whole book of them. That can’t be wrong. Anything that’s OK to say, is OK to say to God.

What’s not OK is wearing a mask. Being phony before God doesn’t work. He sees right through you.

If grief and anger are what’s on your heart, then pray your grief and anger. Being honest is essential to prayer. Cursing God is obviously wrong, but lamenting and questioning are just fine.

Just be yourself. You’re the one He loves.

3 Job 6:14-30 (NIV)

“Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams, as the streams that overflow when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow, but that stop flowing in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels. Caravans turn aside from their routes; they go off into the wasteland and perish. The caravans of Tema look for water, the traveling merchants of Sheba look in hope. They are distressed, because they had been confident; they arrive there, only to be disappointed. Now you too have proved to be of no help; you see something dreadful and are afraid. Have I ever said, ‘Give something on my behalf, pay a ransom for me from your wealth, deliver me from the hand of the enemy, rescue me from the clutches of the ruthless?’

“Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong. How painful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove? Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat my desperate words as wind? You would even cast lots for the fatherless and barter away your friend.

“But now be so kind as to look at me. Would I lie to your face? Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake. Is there any wickedness on my lips? Can my mouth not discern malice?”

Job can’t let this go unchallenged. Eliphaz has accused Job of wrongdoing. Job’s refutation is a simple appeal to the evidence. *“How painful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove? ... But now be so kind as to look at me. Would I lie to your face? Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake. Is there any wickedness on my lips?”*

But Job also says that Eliphaz has crossed a line. *“Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams.”*

He’s not only claiming that they’re wrong; he’s saying they’re lousy friends.

Job is starting to lose ground. While his criticism of Eliphaz is justified, it shows that this is getting under his skin in a way the other trials didn’t. Attacking Job physically is one thing; attacking his integrity is something else entirely. Job handled every attack the enemy could muster, but he can’t handle an attack from his friends. Ironically, with Satan out of the loop Job’s Achilles heel has been found.

Job has slipped into secular reasoning. When the great tragedies befell him, he saw them as God’s will and something to be endured stoically. But when his friends started making false accusations, he just saw that as his friends making false accusations. He forgot that God is the first cause of everything.

We all do this. We memorize the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, but in the heat of the moment we forget.

This spiritual ADD is a lifelong struggle.

4 Job 7:1-21 (ESV)

“Has not man a hard service on earth, and are not his days like the days of a hired hand? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like a hired hand who looks for his wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle and come to their end without hope.

“Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good. The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more; while your eyes are on me, I shall be gone. As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him anymore.”

“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that you set a guard over me? When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,’ then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are a breath. What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment? How long will you not look away from me, nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit? If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind? Why have you made me your mark? Why have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be.”

In addition to everything else, Job’s sleep is attacked. *“But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn ... you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions.”*

Job is sleep deprived. No wonder he says, *“my eye will never again see good.”*

He’s depressed.

We all know that that trials have a purpose, but the details can get complicated. Job’s discouragement is key here. Had he not despaired, the coming lesson wouldn’t have been set up properly.

So Job’s fallen nature is essential to the action. God isn’t just using the physical trials to teach this lesson; he’s using Job’s sinfulness too. Job’s despairing attitude is itself a trial – a self-inflicted one.

So, how should we pray for someone who’s discouraged? Pray for their discouragement to go away? Or that they’ll see God’s hand at work? Or that they’ll quickly learn the lesson God is teaching?

All of the above. Lift them up in every way. Pray for them. Encourage them. Help them physically.

Do you know someone who’s discouraged? Figure out what you’re going to do and do it.

5 Job 8:1-22 (ESV)

Then Bildad the Shubite answered and said: "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation. And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.

"For inquire, please, of bygone ages, and consider what the fathers have searched out. For we are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding?"

"Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water? While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. His confidence is severed, and his trust is a spider's web. He leans against his house, but it does not stand; he lays hold of it, but it does not endure. He is a lush plant before the sun, and his shoots spread over his garden. His roots entwine the stone heap; he looks upon a house of stones. If he is destroyed from his place, then it will deny him, saying, 'I have never seen you.' Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the soil others will spring. "Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting. Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more."

Bildad's comment is so over the top it's like the joke about the ascetic convent that only allowed the nuns to speak once a year. After her first year, a new recruit is invited to say something. She says, "Please fix the heat in my room. I'm freezing." After year two she says, "I need more food. I'm starving." After three years she says, "I'm sorry but I can't stay any longer. My strength is failing." The mother superior replies, "Fine. Ever since you got here, it's been nothing but gripe, gripe, gripe."

After all Job has been through, he sits with his friends for a whole week without saying a word. At last he speaks, and five minutes into the conversation Bildad hits him with, "*How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?*"

In addition to lacking grace, Bildad is wrong. He's absolutely sure that God would only do this in response to specific sins by Job and his children. If only Job will just *seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation.*

What poppycock.

When we get to heaven and see all our errors, we'll see the times when we were absolutely sure we were right. The truth is that even when we're not wrong, our understanding is simple-minded. We can't fully know anything this side of eternity; our brains are too small. Beware of being sure.

Part of seasoning your words with salt is always being aware of the possibility that you're wrong.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Looking back, have you ever thought the Holy Spirit was telling you to stop or change course? How did you respond?
2. How do you pray when you're frustrated, discouraged, or in pain? Do you try to be a perfect saint?
3. Have you ever caught yourself ignoring God in the heat of the moment? Were you able to fix your attitude?
4. The seven deadly sins are: envy, gluttony, greed, lust, pride, rage, and sloth. These are from tradition; they're not directly listed in the Bible. At times, it has been suggested that there's an eighth – despair. Should despair be a sin on par with the other seven? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever been absolutely sure you were right, only to learn you were wrong? How did that make you wiser?

Items for prayer: