

1994 and 1995 are perhaps two of the most memorable years for many in this room. September 22, 1994 - the world was introduced to Joey, Ross, Chandler, Phoebe, Rachel, and Monica through the hit TV show Friends.

It would be November 22, 1995, that we would begin to see the unlikely friendship of a boy named Andy, a cowboy named Woody, and a member of Star Command named Buzz Lightyear, as well as many other toys in the Toy Story franchise. It would be that series that would launch what has widely been considered one of the best-animated movie songs in history.

30 years later, both still have impact...

As people made in the image of God, we have been hard-wired for community and friendships. There is just something about following the journey of friendship that is compelling and draws us in. Today we will dive into what is likely the oldest friendship story in the Bible with Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. The friendship narrative between Job and these three guys takes up most of the book of Job. We are introduced to them in Chapter 2 through Chapter 31.

So we are going to start today in Chapter 2 of Job and pick some highlights from the conversation throughout the other chapters and discover things we should learn and things we should unlearn when it comes to friendship, specifically when it comes to being a friend in the midst of grief.

Prayer

So as you turn or navigate to Job 2 verse 11, let me remind us quickly what had just happened.

There was a challenger who was convinced that God's people only cared about God for his blessings and all the cool stuff He gave them. And God told the challenger that was not true. He said he had this guy named Job, and He is faithful... He could lose everything and would still choose to follow me.

Mark talked about this in much more detail a few weeks ago, so check it out. But for the sake of time, I will remind us of what happened to Job. All ten of Job's kids were together in their house when it collapsed on them... killing every single one of them.

I cannot imagine the pain of this... the suffering taking place... and the reality is that there are many in this room who do not even have to imagine the pain of death... they have been there. I have sat in the room this week with two families who are suffering with the ripples of this reality.

The symptoms of suffering stretch into our lives in so many more ways. There is not a person whose life has been symptom-free from suffering. If you are not suffering now, you are near someone who is... and you likely have and likely will.

Suffering constant bullying,
suffering from an addiction that you just cannot shake, or it may be watching a family member continue to struggle,
suffering from systemic racism,
suffering from the feeling like something about your body is broken,

suffering from human betrayal,
suffering as an elderly body slowly shutting down and not functioning the way it once did,
suffering from the loss of a loved one or the dreams you had for the future.

Suffering is not a unique experience, not a surprising experience, not an episodic experience... it is a universal human experience...
There are few things in life more certain than suffering, but most of us are not certain about how to handle it.

Job is suffering... and buried under the rubble with Job's children is what would seem to be his purpose in life. As a father... everything he had built... accumulated... it was now going to die with him. In a culture that was all about your children being the legacy keepers, every dream he had for the future was dead.

And next, Job develops even more symptoms of suffering in the form of a painful skin disease with boils and sores all over his body.

Job is suffering... Job is grieving... and still in the middle of it all, refusing to curse God. His wife, who has just lost all ten of her kids as well... and her hope for the future... in what I assume has to be an intense moment of pain, tells him just to give up... Curse God and Die...

And after all the heartache... the physical ache... the pain... Job somehow finds it in himself to respond by saying.
"Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Let's pick up with the introduction to the friends...
Job 2:11-13

When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him because they saw how great his suffering was.

This is presumably where our Jewish brothers and sisters get the practice known as "Sitting Shiva" - shiva meaning seven.

So in these few sentences, there is a lot we can learn about being a friend in the middle of grief.

What we can learn:

- Show up
- Grieve with them (weeping, tearing their clothes, dust on heads)
- Shut up (probably the most difficult)

It's often in these moments that we learn who our "real friends" are... they are the ones who show up not just in your victorious but your most vulnerable moments.
And these three guys did that. They practiced presence.

Don't miss the power of practicing presence... As I look back at some of the deepest moments of grief in my life... I cannot remember any profound words that people said to me... but I will never forget who showed up and was present in my pain. So these guys are doing great... they show up, they grieve with him, they shut up... And then Job finally breaks the silence in Chapter 3... and he is not in a good spot... time didn't just heal the wounds.

He wonders why he was even born. He expresses that his life has no purpose and he wishes he was not born... I do want to point out that what Job is doing here is healthy... he is lamenting... He pours out his heart & frustration before God... this is not unusual, and I think is a healthy model we see in Scripture - in fact, it is pretty normative in Scripture...

So let's not be too tough on Job here...

I think right off the bat, this is one of the places we often get it wrong when it comes to caring for those in our lives who are suffering and grieving... when they seem to act out of character... or different than normal - it freaks us out a bit.

We just want them to go back to "normal," - and we just don't know how to respond when things are different... And the reality about suffering and trauma is when it happens to us, things don't "go back to the way they used to be" because things are not the way they used to be... it's usually a sign that things are not good when a person can just "go back to the way things were."

Suffering is never neutral - it always changes people.

And in my experience, suffering's most shocking strikes are to those who seem the most steady, safe & secure. This was Job... a confident and prosperous leader... who is just acting totally different... So they feel, probably like most of us... "Oh No... he has lost it... I need to say something here to help reroute them."

So our knee-jerk response comes out in phrases and actions that usually are not the most helpful... most of these come from a heart of concern and desire to care... but sometimes our well-meaning words get in the way... and we should try to avoid:

- "Must have been their time"
- "God must have wanted an angel"
- Trauma dumping on people
- Compare experiences
- Presume causes or feelings

Which is where we begin to discover where Job's three friends start to go wrong.

Once Job is done speaking, the friends line up to give him words of comfort and advice. And this is a cycle that is pretty repetitive for the book of Job...

Speech Cycle #1:

Job (3)

Eliphaz (4-5)

Job (6-7)

Bildad (8)

Job (9-10)

Zophar (11)

Job (12-14)

Speech Cycle #2:

Eliphaz (15)

Job (16-17)

Bildad (18)
Job (19)
Zophar (20)
Job (21)
Speech Cycle #3:
Eliphaz (22)
Job (23-24)
Bildad (25)
Job (26-31)

And really each of them represents some of the best wisdom or philosophical arguments that could be provided, beginning with Eliphaz.

ELIPHAZ - Job 4:7–8, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it."

Eliphaz Wisdom -

- Job, this is how God governs the cosmos. The good are blessed, and the evil are punished.
- His Conclusion: Job's suffering must be related to his sin

BILDAD - Job 8:3–4 "Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you will seek God earnestly and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your prosperous state.

Bildad Wisdom

- Job, your children received what they were due, and you will as well. Just admit it, and this will all go away.
- His Conclusion: Since God is just and holy, he cannot be at fault. Admit your fault & be restored. The only reason for his suffering is Job's moral failings.

ZOPHAR - Job 11:4–5: Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides. Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin."

Zophar Wisdom:

- Job, if you could only see everything from God's perspective, you would recognize that you actually got off rather lightly
- His Conclusion: Stop complaining and look at the bright side Job, you are guilty and God should have given you a bigger punishment.

In all of these speeches, Job is contending his innocence and his friends just are not convinced. And they are trying to help him see, based on the wisdom of man, this is just how the world works.

Job is clearly not impressed by his counselors - in Chapter 6 he describes them as someone he had hoped would bring him refreshment... but they were like a riverbed that was dry dust... taking things from bad to worse.

What Job needed in this moment were friends... not misguided advice and solutions... In chapter 12, he sarcastically notes that when they die, all wisdom will die with them. After all the speeches are done, every one of them ultimately points toward the Retribution Principle that Mark talked about a couple of weeks ago. Retribution Principle: Good things come to good people. Bad things come to bad people. In the end, this forces us to assume that suffering can only happen because of specific sin.

And they are not the only ones who think this way! In fact, this idea was so pervasive that one time the disciples asked Jesus when they saw a blind man in John 9:2 - His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" They are convinced that someone did something to deserve this... But Jesus answers them and says... John 9:3 - "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Next, Jesus spits in the dirt, makes some mud, and puts it on the guy's eyes and heals him.

Jesus is flipping this thinking of the retribution principle upside down... I think one of the problems that Job's friends found themselves in, that we often do as well, is and need to unlearn - We spend all of our time trying to uncover the root of suffering, instead of hopefully anticipating the fruit of suffering.

Dr. Wendell Nelson often helps us on staff remember this. He will often let us know how excited he is to see what God is going to teach us in our pain. Your suffering is not about the root, it's about the fruit! We already know the root of suffering comes from living in a broken world that is scared by sin. I wonder how things would have played out if his friends would have responded to Job a bit differently after he spoke up the first time... What if instead of talking to Job, they started talking to God. One of the practices I have tried to implement in my life lately is to not talk to a person about God unless I have talked to God about that person. The book of James calls this being quick to listen and slow to speak. And in this process, God starts to do something in me. He starts to give me more capacity for empathy and love for that person. It becomes less about me ministering to that person and letting the Savior who I say is sufficient do His job...

Maybe the most powerful thing you can do for someone who is suffering is to stop searching for patterns and patches and start making petitions. There is an error in Job's friends that was not necessarily the words they said or the principles that they shared... but it was a matter of timing... and tact... and tone... They began with searching for the root... searching for solutions... striving to be saviors... They are content to speak from their finite knowledge, instead of leading him to the infinite God.

I think this is critical for us to unlearn as friends or family of those grieving. To not treat prayer as the last resort but the greatest resource. So often we want to start with solutions and end with the Savior...

In fact, even if your friends are not people who believe in God, this is one of the times they are most open to things that are spiritual and most turned off by superficial. Like we sang about earlier, speak the name of Jesus. If we really do believe it has power... Healing... And life.

Yes, there even may be a little truth in the retribution principle at play... But thankfully for us all, the salvation narrative is not one of retribution... it is the kindness of God that leads to repentance.

Cause and effect theology is just impulsive thinking... it's what makes the most sense. But let me remind us of the good news that we call the Gospel today... a perfect righteous man would suffer and die, so sinners could be made righteous. Our forgetfulness of this truth, which breeds bad theology, can be the most dangerous things on this planet... and the scary thing is we all have a little running through us. This is why friendship and community matter so much.

Because God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts... we don't always understand what and why things are happening... If you are living in a moment like Job... where you are wondering how this is good... you are confused... tired... running on empty... doubting that God has a plan, is not feeble faith, it is just faith.

Trusting that there is something happening in this world that is greater than we can see... greater than we can know... or understand.

Suffering is never neutral - it will cause you to turn one of two directions. The challenger back in the beginning of Job realized this... Suffering will either cause a person to run toward God or away from God - **suffering is never neutral**. It will change us in one way or another.

It is a part of the already, but not yet state of the Kingdom of God we are living in... doubts and frustrations are normative faith experiences...

in those moments we have a God who wants us to run to Him and not from Him... You better believe that's what I want from my kids... I want them to run to me when things are confusing and difficult and don't make sense... not away from me. And I am going to hold them close, not push them away.

I don't think Randy Newman was way off when he wrote those lyrics for a boy and his plastic toys:

*"Some other folks might be
A little bit smarter than I am
Bigger and stronger too
But none of them will ever love you
The way I do
It's me and you"*

If we could learn humility and unlearn the need to be the one who knows it all... But choose the posture of love, which is a posture of listening first... and pointing people to a sufficient Savior.

Pray.