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Job 2 - 11

"Friends and Suffering"

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God has created us with a need for friendship – to have friends as well as being a friend. Friends are especially vital during difficult times. It's important for all of us to learn how to be a good friend to those who are suffering. In the book of Job, Job was suffering from unimaginable pain – the death of all ten of his children, the loss of everything materially, and even physical affliction. If anybody needed a friend, it was Job! Job had a circle of five friends – his wife and four buddies – who sometimes proved to be good friends, and who sometimes proved to be not-so-good friends. In today's study, Pastor Gary takes the good and the bad of Job's friends and translates it into three important principles for being a good friend to someone who is suffering.

Friends And Suffering

1. The people closest to Job tried to make sense of the tragic things that happened to him by offering various kinds of advice, some of which fall squarely into the "not so hot" category.
2. When we go through times of crisis, there's no question that friends are critical.
3. "Mrs. Job" has received a lot of bad press over the years, so to speak, but it's important to recognize that she was suffering too.
 - a. Remember, she was with Job when all ten of their children were buried!
 - b. Her grief was real and we should give the benefit of the doubt concerning her regrettable remark.
 - i. **Job 2:9** – *"His wife said to him, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!'"*

What Job's Friends Did Right

4. They came to him when he was suffering.
 - a. **Job 2:11** - *"When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon hi, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him."*

5. They empathized with him.
 - a. Empathy is not the same as sympathy.
 - i. Empathy means that you understand and share another person's experiences and emotions, while sympathy means that you care about and are sorry about someone else's trouble, grief, or misfortune.
 - b. **Job 2:12** - *"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."*
 - c. **Romans 12:15** - *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."*
 - d. We should never assume that we know exactly what others are going through, because suffering is unique.

6. They spent time with him.
 - a. **Job 2:13** - *"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."*
 - b. From this account in the book of Job, Jews started the practice of "Shiva," which means that a person comes to stay with a family member or friend who has lost a loved one, and during the seven-day period of mourning, that person remains silent.¹
 - c. Pastor Gary said: "We always think we have to say something, and we always think we have to explain something. [But] it is sometimes best to just bless someone with your presence and not say a word. Sometimes we get ourselves in trouble by what we say, even though we mean well. Now, defer to [the person, because] some people in their suffering and grief may not want other people around, so give them the space they need. Some people need to grieve alone, [because] that's the way they deal with [grief]... Sometimes the best thing we can do for someone in crisis is just to be there with them, without offering any advice or asking

¹ <http://www.jewfaq.org/search.shtml?Keywords=shiva>

any questions or giving any explanations as to why. [Sometimes it's best to] just be there in silence.”

- d. Pastor Gary said: “[By] the way, I want to say this tenderly to some of you who have been going through something, and you’ve thought that God was silent. And you’ve thought, ‘Why isn’t God answering me? Why [doesn’t it] seem like God cares? He seems [to be] silent.’ [It] could just be that in the anguish of your soul, God is sitting shiva with you as well.”
- e. **Proverbs 18:24** - *“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

What Job’s Friends Did Wrong

- 7. Some people, when speaking about matters that are beyond their understanding, oftentimes say things about God that are misleading and completely inaccurate.
 - a. “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.” - Author Unknown²
 - b. **Proverbs 17:28** - *“Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”*
- 8. Eliphaz believed Job must have sinned; therefore, God was judging him.
 - a. **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.”*
 - b. **Galatians 6:7** - *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”*
 - c. Pastor Gary said: “It’s never appropriate for us to assume that someone’s suffering is the direct result of sinful choices. [This] certainly wasn’t the case with Job. Job was an upright man, [who was] blameless [and] shunned evil. There wasn’t a sin issue going on in Job’s life that he deserved this.”
 - d. Eliphaz, in his ignorance, believed in the so-called doctrine of retribution, which basically comes down to this: bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people.
 - i. Jesus, in **John 9**, dealt with people who believed this “doctrine” to be true, and he told them that sin wasn’t the reason the man was born blind.
- 9. Bildad believed Job’s children must have sinned; therefore, God was judging them.

² <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/05/17/remain-silent/>

- a. **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.”*
 - b. **Luke 13:4** - *“Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?”*
 - c. Bildad’s remarks are cruel and insensitive to say the least!
 - d. Pastor Gary said: “... we have to be careful... Sometimes we say things that are cruel and we don’t know it. Let me just give a word of advice as one who has... over 30 years of ministry. Having observed the pain of parents who have lost children, and having done funerals for parents who have had to bury their children, [there] are a couple of things not to say. Here’s one thing I’ve heard said, and I know [the person meant] well. But let me tell you, this is hurtful. Please never say to grieving parents, ‘Well, God needed another angel in heaven.’ First of all, [this is] insensitive. Second of all, it’s theologically incorrect. When people die, children or adults, [they] don’t go to heaven and become [an angel.] Angels are separate beings created by God. Believers who know Christ as their Savior or little children who go to heaven, [do not become angels]... Also don’t say things like, ‘There’s a reason for everything.’ Don’t say, ‘Well, it must have been God’s will.’ All of [these] things are so dismissive... [and it’s almost like you are saying], ‘Get over it.’ ”
10. Zophar believed Job deserved even more suffering, but God was being merciful.
- a. **Job 11:4-6** - *“You say to God, ‘My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.’ 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.”*
 - b. Zophar’s comments clearly show that he was the harshest of Job’s three friends.
 - c. Don’t say, “You ought to count your blessings, because it could be worse!”
 - d. **Job 42:7** - *“After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.’”*

How To Be A True Friend

- 11. We need to come quickly to the aid of a friend who is suffering.
- 12. We need to empathize with friends, rather than criticize or theorize about their suffering.

13. We need to offer the gift of silent presence.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Job 2:7-13](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times of suffering or difficulty when they've received "counsel or advice" from well-meaning people.
4. After hearing Pastor Gary's comments about "Mrs. Job," do you feel differently toward her? (See #3 above)
5. Spend time reading and discussing the Scriptures that help us understand the things Job's friends did right. (See #4 - #5 - #6 above)
6. How has the Lord used you to be a blessing to someone going through a time of crisis?
7. How did following the model of prayer and presence minister to the hurting person/people?
8. Why do people feel like they need to explain the reason(s) someone is experiencing difficult times or offer advice that is oftentimes misrepresents God?
9. How have you experienced the peace and comfort of the Holy Spirit in times of suffering?
10. Provide an overview of Pastor Gary's comments concerning each of Job's three friends, and spend time talking about steps Christians can take to avoid these critical mistakes. (See #7 - #8 - #9 above)
11. How do you plan to implement the three points Pastor Gary made concerning the ways you can be a true friend? (See #11 - #12 - #13 above)
12. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).