

Desperation and the Unknown

The book of Job illustrates that ***Desperate people trust God even when they don't understand why they are suffering.*** There will be times when you have no idea why you're suffering, why God hasn't yet done what you've asked Him to do, or why others seem to have a much easier and more comfortable life than you. The book of Job tells us that in the midst of such unknowns you can and should trust God as good and generous and compassionate.

Opening Question. Do you wrestle with the issue of “why the righteous suffer” or “the problem of evil” in general? Why or why not? In what contexts is this issue most troublesome for you (your own suffering, the trauma of world events, etc.)?

Read Job 1:6-22

1. What do you notice about the interaction between God and Satan in Job 1:6-12? How does this interaction set up the plot of the book of Job?
2. What do you observe about Job's response in Job 1:20-21? What doctrines or truths inform Job's response to the loss of his wealth and children?
3. Read Job 2:9-10, the conversation between Job and his wife after the second round of devastation at the hands of Satan. What are the presuppositions/attitudes behind the comments of Job's wife? What truths informed Job's reply to her?
4. Read Job 2:11-13. What do you notice about the initial actions/attitudes of Job's friends?

Steve said:

When we encounter someone who is suffering severely, there are two extremes to avoid. One extreme is to ignore the person who is suffering. . . .When we do that, those suffering can feel neglected and unloved.

The other extreme is to charge in with answers, trying to fix others' problems and address every doubt. Sometimes people with vast amounts of spiritual knowledge are most vulnerable to this pitfall. This was the case with Job's friends.

5. When you have a friend or acquaintance who is suffering, do you tend to gravitate toward one extreme or the other? If you're willing, give an example.
6. Read Job 4:7-8. What was Job's "friend" Eliphaz (not so subtly) saying to Job here?

Steve said:

The warning from the counsel of Job's friends is this: when you come alongside someone who is suffering and desperate, don't say more than you know. Don't assume that you are omniscient, knowing every factor that has caused the other person's suffering. I'm not saying that you never speak truth to a hurting person. But I am saying that we need the humility before God that Job's friends didn't have. And we need to speak only those words that address "the need of the moment." As we read in Ecclesiastes 3, there is a time to speak and a time to remain silent.

7. What are the challenges involved in avoiding "saying more than you know" when trying to comfort a friend who is suffering?
8. Why did Job have to "retract" and "repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6)?

Steve said:

The warning from the response of Job is against insulting God by saying things that are not true of Him. Remember that the entire plot of Job revolves around God's reputation in heaven. The heavenly host was listening to Job's words and was watching Job's responses. Initially he didn't sin in response to his loss (Job 2:10), but eventually he said too much and had to "repent in dust and ashes."

9. Do you agree that the book of Job speaks against the idea that "you can say ***anything*** to God; He can take it"? How can we genuinely express our disappointment with God without insulting Him?

Scriptures about "the unknown" to ponder this week:

Job 1-2

Job 38-39

Job 40-41

Job 42

Psalm 73