

INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth study in the teaching series from Job called "Turning Tears into Telescopes." This message is entitled "With Friends Like These - Who Needs Enemies?"

Since I grew up in Alabama, the birthplace of rednecks, I got a real chuckle out of the following list of "Things You'll Never Hear a Redneck Say."

1. "I thought Graceland was tacky."
2. "Duct tape won't fix that."
3. "Wrasslin's fake."
4. "That deer head detracts from the decor."
5. "We don't keep firearms in this house."
6. "I prefer cappuccino to espresso."
7. "I don't really have a favorite NASCAR driver."
8. "Hey, here's an episode of 'Hee Haw' we haven't seen!"
9. "I'll take Shakespeare for 1,000, Alex."
10. "Checkmate."

As we think about Job's three friends, we are going to learn some things you should never hear one friend say to another friend. In the previous lessons we learned Job lost his fortune, his family, and his fitness, but he didn't lose his faith. In this chapter we are introduced to Job's three friends who have come to comfort him. But they don't help him, instead their words of accusation only add to Job's torment. They say things you should *never* hear a friend say.

When I was a teenager, I really enjoyed playing basketball. I played high school ball in L.A. (Lower Alabama) back in the olden days of the early 1970s. And no, we didn't use a peach basket and a ladder to get the ball out! I can recall that whenever a player was called for a foul, the opposing fans pointed their fingers at the offending player and chanted together, "You, you, you, you, you!" Maybe it was just an Alabama thing. The fans did it to try to upset the player who had committed the foul.

In William Blake's engraving of Job's three friends, they can be seen pointing their fingers at Job. They remind me of those basketball fans in Alabama. It's as if they're saying, "You, you, you, you, you...you're guilty, Job. That's why you're suffering!" With friends like these, who needs enemies? Let's meet them in 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."

Now if that were all we ever knew about these three friends, they would have been heroes. But

instead they started talking and became zeroes! The vast majority of the book is given over to the speeches given by these friends and Job's response to each one. These three friends basically say the same thing: "Job, you are suffering because you are wicked."

Their speeches follow a pattern: Eliphaz speaks first, indicating he's probably the oldest. Then Job responds to Eliphaz. Then Bildad speaks, and Job responds. Then Zophar speaks, and Job responds. This cycle repeats itself three full times. We won't take time to examine every word they spoke. Instead, I want to examine the attitudes expressed by these friends. They show us both the wrong way and the right way to help a friend who's suffering.

I. THE WRONG WAY TO HELP A FRIEND WHO'S HURTING

Much of what the friends said was theologically correct, but they made two fundamental mistakes. If you're trying to help a hurting friend you must avoid these two errors.

1. Don't make false assumptions about why they're suffering

False assumptions can get you in trouble. I heard about a carpet layer who was replacing some old carpet in a customer's den. When he finished tacking down the new carpet he reached for cigarettes he kept in his shirt pocket, and they weren't there. About that time he noticed a lump in the middle of the carpet about the size of a pack of cigarettes. He didn't want to go to the trouble of taking up the entire carpet, so after looking around to see he was alone he took his hammer and beat the object flat to hide any evidence of his mistake.

When he got to his truck he found his pack of cigarettes on the seat. As he lit up the homeowner ran out and said, "Hey, have you seen my television remote control? I'm sure I left it somewhere in the den." It's a dangerous thing to make false assumptions!

False assumptions lead to false conclusions, which lead to wrong actions. Job's friends assumed only bad people suffer. So since Job was suffering, they concluded he was hiding some deep, dark sin. So instead of helping him, their words only added to his misery.

Eliphaz said to Job: "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked...And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, why it is so dark you cannot see, and why a flood of water covers you." (Job 22:5-6; 9-11)

There is no evidence Job did any of those things. In fact, in Chapters 1 and 2 God says Job was a man who was blameless and upright, and a man who shunned evil. When you are trying to help a friend who is hurting, be careful you don't make the same mistake.

2. Don't make faulty assertions about God's will

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there was a lot of publicity generated by a church sign in Tyler that proclaimed, "The Big Easy is the Modern Sodom and Gomorrah." That preacher

believes God's will was to send Katrina as punishment on the people of New Orleans. That's the same thing the Al-Qaeda terrorist web sites are proclaiming. You may recall that after 9/11 Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell said the terrorist attacks were God's punishment on America. They later retracted their statements.

You're on dangerous ground whenever you make sweeping statements about what is and isn't God's will. If the Bible says something is God's will, then believe it. Anything beyond that is speculation and conjecture. Bildad thought he had God's will for Job's life figured out. He said: "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 look to God 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 rightful place." (Job 8:3-6)

Bildad claimed to be speaking for God. He told Job the reason his children died was because they were sinners, and if Job repented maybe God would restore him. Be careful when anyone starts trying to tell you what God's will is for your life.

When I started sharing my faith in high school, I used a wonderful little tract produced by Campus Crusade called "The Four Spiritual Laws." I remember witnessing at Panama City Beach and asking a guy, "Have you heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?" He said, "No what songs do they sing?" You have probably heard of the four spiritual laws. But have you ever heard of the Four Spiritual Flaws? (Adapted from Charles Swindoll) These are four faulty beliefs some people have. (1) If you're a Christian you'll never suffer. In the Bible promises you will suffer if you're a follower of Jesus. (2) Every problem you have is answered in the Bible. Many problems are addressed, but if your computer crashes, don't look in your Bible, call technical support. (3) If you're having problems, you are unspiritual. That's what Job's friends thought about him. (4) God administers justice immediately. It is true that God's perfect justice will one day be administered against the wicked. But God doesn't always punish sin in this life. The Bible says in I Timothy 5:24 "The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment before them; the sins of others trail behind." (NIV) Don't swallow these four spiritual flaws. If you're trying to help a friend who is hurting, avoid these big mistakes.

II. THE RIGHT WAY TO HELP A FRIEND WHO'S HURTING

We read in Job 2:11-13 that Job's friends started out doing the right thing. They cried with Job. They put on sackcloth and ashes and sat with him for seven days without saying anything. They could have left and gone home and remained great friends. But when they started talking, they stopped helping. That should be a lesson to us. I want to share five good things to do when you're trying to help a friend who is hurting. This isn't ALL you can do, but it's a start.

1. Be there for them

The best thing you can do is just to be present with your friends during their time of suffering. You don't have to talk to them, just be there. Sometimes the best thing you can do for hurting friend is to show up and hug them.

In his book, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, Len Sweet shares a letter from a physician that conveys the power of being with someone in their pain. He wrote: "Today I visited an eight-year-old girl dying of cancer. She was in almost constant pain. As I entered her room, I was overcome immediately by her suffering—so unjust, unfair, unreasonable. Even more overpowering was the presence of her grandmother lying in bed beside her with her huge body embracing this precious, inhuman suffering. I stood in awe, for I knew I was on holy ground. I will never forget the great, gentle arms and body of this grandmother. She never spoke while I was there. She was holding and participating in suffering that she could not relieve, and somehow her silent presence was relieving it. No words could express the magnitude of her love."

2. Cry with them

The best thing Job's friends did was to sit in the ashes with him and to weep along with Job. The Bible says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15) Tears communicate your compassion much more eloquently than words ever can. Don't ever tell a hurting friend to stop crying. Instead, cry with them.

3. Listen more than you talk

In James 1:19 the Bible says we should be "slow to speak and quick to listen." That's why God gave you two ears and only one mouth. He wants to listen at least twice as much as you talk. Some people claim a dog is man's best friend. I think that's because you can talk to a dog and they won't talk a back! Someone said you can keep silent and people will only suspect you're a fool, or you can speak and remove all doubt! Every hurting person needs a friend who will listen to him or her.

4. Attend to their physical needs

It's great that Baptists usually take food into the home of a bereaved family. Maybe you heard about the three kids in school who were explaining the symbols of their religions. A Jewish boy showed the students a Star of David. The Catholic boy showed them a crucifix. The little Baptist boy showed them a casserole dish!

The Bible says in Proverbs 17:17, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." When you have a friend who is suffering, stick with them and be sensitive to their physical needs. Watch over them. A person who is grieving or suffering often is so burdened they forget to take care of the simplest physical needs. They may forget to eat, sleep, or take care of their hygiene needs. I knew a man in Alabama who performed a ministry to every family in the church that experienced a death. He would take his shoeshine kit into the home and polish the shoes of the family members who would be attending the funeral. If you want to help a friend in need, attend to their physical needs.

5. Pray with them

It's always appropriate to pray with someone. Don't preach a sermon in your prayers. Don't pray long, drawn out prayers. Don't use this kind of prayer as an opportunity to catch up on your

prayer life. Just hold their hand, or put your arm around their shoulder and ask God to give them strength and peace. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much. (James 5:16)

I read an article written by Linda Mae Richardson entitled, "When I was Diagnosed with Cancer." She wrote about how seven different friends related to her after she was diagnosed with cancer, and how she felt after they left. Friend #1 said, "I can't believe you have cancer. I always thought you were so active and healthy." When she left Linda wrote, "I felt alienated and somehow very 'different.'" As she talked about different treatment options, Friend #2 said, "Whatever you do, don't take chemotherapy. It's a poison!" When she left Linda wrote, "I felt scared and confused." Friend #3 said, "Perhaps God is disciplining you for some sin in your life." When she left Linda wrote, "I felt guilty." Friend #4 said, "All things work together for good." When she left Linda wrote, "I felt angry." Friend #5 said, "If your faith is great enough, God will heal you." Linda wrote, "I felt my faith must be inadequate." Friend #6 never came to visit her at all. Linda wrote, "I felt sad and alone." Friend #7 said, "I'm here. I care. I'm here to help you through this. Let me pray for you." Linda said, "When she left, I felt loved!" May we all be like Friend #7!

III. THE BEST WAY TO RESPOND TO FRIENDS WHO FAIL YOU

Sometimes we are like Job's three friends—we're trying to help a friend. But let's put ourselves in Job's sandals for a moment. How do you think he must have felt? Maybe you find yourself in a situation where you're the one who's struggling and you feel your friends have failed you.

1. Don't deny your disappointment

The easiest response is just to forget it and pretend it never happened. But because these were friends of Job, he wasn't about to let them get away with their false accusations. He refused to just put on a smiley face and just pretend everything was fine. Job never stomped off in a huff and said, "You're not my friends anymore." Instead he challenged them for their words of accusation. He said, "If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile.' I still dread all my sufferings, for I know you will not hold me innocent. Since I am already found guilty, why should I struggle in vain?" (Job 9:27-29) "You, however, smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you! If only you would be altogether silent!" (Job 13:4-5a) It's okay to be honest with your friends. If a friend has failed you, let them know you are disappointed and tell them how much you need their help.

2. Don't let them make you bitter

It's so easy to get bitter—even within the church. That's why we have so many church splits; people have been disappointed by the behavior of other Christians, and they get bitter and leave the church to start another one.

I like the story of the man who had been stranded on a deserted island for ten years. He was the only one on the island, but there was plenty of food and water. Finally he was rescued. As his rescuers were saving him they saw three buildings he had built on the island. They asked him about the buildings. He said, "The first one is my house. The second one is my church." They

said, “What about the third building?” He said, “Oh, that’s the church I USED to go to!”

Job was the target of hostility from his friends, but he refused to direct hostility back toward them. When someone insults us, our human nature screams out to say, “Yeah? Well, the same to you and more of it!” Job refused to become bitter about his friends’ false accusations. He could have easily said, “Just wait until you find yourself in my situation, I’ll just tell you how rotten a sinner YOU are! No, this is what he said, “...Miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing? I also could speak like you, if you were in my place; I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you. But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief.” (Job 16:2-5) He said, “I’m not going to treat you the way you treated me. I’m going to treat you the way I want to be treated.”

3. Pray for them

We’ll talk about this much more in a future message, but there is a profound turning point in the book of Job. Job was suffering greatly, and then God removed his suffering and restored more blessings to Job than he had previously. An important question for us to consider is: When did God change Job’s misery to blessing? The answer is found in Job 42:10: “After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.” Job could have easily said, “Get out of here! You’re no longer my friends.” But instead he prayed for them. And the Bible says it was AFTER he prayed for them that the Lord prospered him.

Are there some people in your past who have failed you during your time of need? Don’t become bitter, pray for them. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He knew one of His friends would betray Him, and another would deny him. He knew all of them would desert Him in His time of need. Knowing all this, what did He do? He prayed for them.

CONCLUSION

Job’s wife told him to curse God and die. His friends accused him of wickedness. You need to know that sometimes your friends and family members will fail you. In his book, *God’s Outrageous Claims*, Lee Stroble tells the story of some parents on the East Coast who received a phone call from their son who had been fighting during the Korean War. They hadn’t heard from him in months, so they were thrilled to hear his voice. He told them he was in San Francisco on the way home. He said, “Mom, I just wanted to let you know I’m bringing a buddy home with me. He got hurt pretty bad. He only has one eye, one arm, and one leg. I’d sure like for him to live with us.” His mother said, “Sure son. He can live with us for a while.” The son replied, “Mom, you don’t understand, I want him to live with us.” She said, “We could try it for a few months.” He said, “No, mom, he doesn’t have anywhere else to go. I want him to live with us permanently. He only has one eye, one arm, and one leg. He’s messed up pretty badly.”

After talking with her husband, she said, “Now, son, we can try it for six months or so. You’re being emotional because you’ve been in the war. That boy will be a drag on you and constant problem for all of us. Be reasonable.”

The phone clicked dead. The next day the parents got a telegram saying their son had committed suicide. When they received his body, they turned their tear-stained eyes to look down with unspeakable horror at the body of their son...who had lost an eye, an arm, and a leg in battle.”

Family members and friends may fail you, but Jesus never will.

When I was in college I led a coffee house on Saturday nights we called “The Liberation House.” We didn’t serve coffee, it was just a place where teenagers could gather and hear music. I used to take lots of popular songs and change the lyrics to include a Christian message.

With apologies to James Taylor, one of the songs I used to sing said, “When you’re down and troubled and you need a helping hand. And nothing, nothing is going right. Close your eyes and pray to him, and soon He will be there to brighten up, even your darkest night...Hey, ain’t it good to know that you’ve got a friend, when people can be so cold. They’ll hurt you yes, and desert you, they’ll take your soul if you let them. Oh, but don’t let them. You just call out His name and you know wherever you are; Call on Jesus to help you again. Don’t you know that winter, spring, summer or fall; all you have you to do is call. And He’ll be there yes, He will you’ve got friend. You’ve got a friend, oh yes, you do. You’ve got a friend...” (Original words by Carole King)

Job discovered that sometimes your wife will disappoint you and tell you to curse God and die. He discovered that those he considered to be his closest friends might sometimes turn against you. In spite of being disappointed, Job learned something eternally important. He learned that Jesus is a friend who will never desert you. Job looked through his tears, and they became telescopes that allowed him to see a Redeemer who would be a friend who would never leave him or forsake him. In Job 19:25 he said, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.”

Jesus called His disciples His friends—even though they failed him. And Jesus wants to be your friend today. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus is called the friend of sinners. Job qualified, I qualify and so do you. Do you need a friend today? Why don’t you pray this prayer?

“Dear Lord, I need a friend who will never fail me. I need You to come into my life and to help me through my pain. Lord, help me not to become bitter or angry toward those people in my life who have failed me. I pray for them today. Because You have forgiven me, I forgive them. Help me, Lord, to find those who are in need. I want to be the kind of friend to them that You are to me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

OUTLINE

I. THE WRONG WAY TO HELP A FRIEND WHO'S HURTING

1. Make false assumptions about why they're suffering
2. Make faulty assertions about God's will

II. THE RIGHT WAY TO HELP A FRIEND WHO'S HURTING

1. Be there for them
2. Cry with them
3. Listen more than you talk
4. Attend to their physical needs
5. Pray with them

III. THE BEST WAY TO RESPOND TO FRIENDS WHO FAIL YOU

1. Don't deny your disappointment
2. Don't let them make you bitter
3. Pray for them

"After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before." *Job 42:10*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes