**EHS 4 The Problem of Suffering**

The path toward emotionally healthy spirituality involves learning how to deal with and accept and work through the suffering in our lives.

Unresolved grief will hinder us as we try to move forward.

The past 19 months have been a time of grief for all of us.

It is personal for me, as I lost my dad.

Jan lost her brother-in-law and her sister.

Jose Espinoza lost his wife. Jason’s mom’s funeral was just yesterday.

All of us have experienced trauma.

We need to process that grief.

We can’t just tell one another “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)

So get happy. This is for your good.

Aren’t you glad you are a Christian? But even for us, processing grief is hard work.

Christian funerals are not the same as those in “the world.” We have what we call “celebration of life”

But let’s get real. There is still suffering and grief.

The five stages of grief are: Denial and Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.

And we are not just talking about death in this sermon. We are talking about processing all kinds of suffering and trauma.

EHS talks about “Journey Through the Wall” and “Enlarge Your Soul Through Grief and Loss.

So, where in the Bible should we go to receive instruction from God on how to do this?

Job!

Job answers questions about theodicy. Given what we know about the world—all the evil and suffering in the world—is God good?

Questions we all have:

Why is there evil in the world?

Why is there suffering in the world?

Why do we suffer?

What should we do when we suffer and when others suffer?

This lesson is not about the question of evil—it is about the question of suffering.

So, Why is there evil in the world?

Because God loves us. Love gives a choice. God gives choice.

That is why God put that pesky tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. God had to give us a choice—a real choice. Not between $1000 and a punch in the nose.

Genesis 3:1-7 The fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was “desirable.” Sin is “desirable.”

And thus evil and sin and suffering came into the world.

We saw last week from Exodus 34:6-7 that sin has consequences and sin brings suffering into the world. Generational sins affect us. We need to take stock of that, take it to God and begin the difficult work of moving forward.

But, why do we suffer?

Why am I suffering now?

What should I do with my suffering?

Job 1:1-5

Note: Uz means East, so Job is a worshipper of God who lives to the East of the Promised Land. He was not Jewish!

Job was “blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

Wow! We should be so good!

God is really going to bless Job with good things, right?

v. 3 He was the “greatest man among all the people of the East.”

Muhammad Ali had nothing on Job!

Job 1:4-5 Job was a good, loving father. He prayed for his children and even made sacrifices in case they sinned.

Q: How would you rate Job as a good person on a scale of 1 – 10?

Surely he is blessed by God and he will continue to be blessed by God because he is faithful in everything.

God is going to “put a fence” around Job, right?

Job 1:6-12 A remarkable passage. Satan is a “fallen angel”? Like human beings, Satan has free will.

God: What have you been up to?

Satan: Oh, nothing really. Just hanging out, having a few talks with people. No big deal.

Just trying to destroy a few lives, to create confusion, deceive some, accuse others, trying to undermine faith in you. Nothing in particular…

Satan is patrolling his territory. He is very confident that the earth is his. Heaven is God’s but the earth is his. “I own this place.”

Job 1:8 God to Satan: It may look that way, but it is not true. I still have a few who are faithful to me.

Q: Can you relate? Does it sometimes seem like Satan is pretty much in control in the world? Who in the OT (his name starts with an E) felt the same way? Eliljah I am the only one left…

Job 1:9-11 Satan: Job does not really love you. Satan is a total cynic. Job is paid off. Job is spoiled. Take away his blessings and we will see that he is really just selfish and in it for himself.

A question for you, would you be faithful to God even if he had not given you the blessings you have? Are you like the way Satan claims Job is? If God brought some real suffering into your life, might you become disillusioned and leave God?

Job 1:12 A hard question: Why did God allow Satan to do this to Job?

Why does God allow suffering in our lives?

Job raises more questions than it answers.

- To show Satan?

- Because God knows Job better than Satan?

- So that Job can prove to God and to

 - So Job can prove to himself how faithful he is?

- For our sake?

Job 1:13-19 How does Satan tempt Job? Why did he choose these things?

-Maybe they were Job’s weak point. Satan thought so.

-Satan was overconfident. He underestimated Job.

Is he underestimating you?

Q: If Satan was given freedom to tempt you what would he tempt you with?

Disaster!!!!

Job 1:20-22 Q: How would you describe Job’s response?

v. 20 (and I have missed this in the past). Job was really torn up.

Job went into mourning.

We Americans, especially we white European Americans do not know how to grieve.

Now we find out why Job worshipped God, and Satan was wrong in his assessment. What about you?

In all this, Job did not sin. Amen, Job!!! (Job is not yet at the wall from EHS)

Job 2:1-8 skin for skin is a saying for the Jews. It meant something like this: A man would exchange anything to save his “skin” (ie. his life) skin for skin means property for person.

A Turkish proverb: We would give our beard to save our head.

Satan thinks Job’s religion is about himself, not about God.

Q: Why is Satan so confident? (he cannot imagine a person with selfless motives)

The world will be like this. They will assume that you are a fake.

Q: Will Job disown God in order to save his skin?

Would you forsake God to save your skin?

V 7-8 Job is really suffering here

Job 2:9-10 Job’s wife is done with this.

Thanks a lot, Job’s wife!!!

Who might Job’s wife be for you? Who might tell you it is time to quit?

v. 10 Job accepts “trouble” from God. In all this, he did not sin. (but look at Job 3:1-26)

Summary so far:

We need to find a healthy way to deal with suffering loss and grief.

The existence of evil and suffering does not mean that God does not love us or has stopped loving us.

There are no simple answers.

Mourning for loss and suffering is OK

But we need to find a way to trust God in all this.

2:11-13 Pretend you know nothing about Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Q: How would you describe them, based on this passage alone?

 (joke: Who is the shortest person in the Bible? Bildad the Shuhite)

These guys are the ideal friends. They are sitting with Job and listening. They are “Sympathizing” with him. That is what we need when we suffer loss.

It will be OK NO!

You will get through this. NO!

God will use this for his benefit. NO!

He/she is with God now. NO!

Sit, listen and sympathize (feel what they are feeling).

The central question of the rest of Job is this: Why did Job suffer? (the big, fancy technical word for this question is theodicy)

Q: Why do we suffer? (take lots of time for answers here)

 a. sin of others

 b. our own sin

 c. natural causes (earthquakes, weather, diseases, aging, death)

 d. God disciplines us (Heb 12:3-11)

 e. Helps us to grow (James 1:2-4)

 f. Our godly response gives God glory (Jn 9:3)

 g. Come to know Christ (Col 1:24)

Q: Of these, why did Job suffer?

Job 3:1-11 Q: How is Job feeling? How is he doing spiritually?

In the past I would have assumed Job is sinning here. Now, I am not so sure.

Eliphaz: Job 4:1-9, 17-18 Why does Eliphaz say Job is suffering? (his sin) Is he correct?

Q: Do you ever tend to think this way? Might you be right?

Job 6:2-3, 14-23 Q: Is Job’s analysis of his friends fair?

Job 6:24-30 7:20-21 Q: According to Job, why is he suffering? (he is righteous and does not deserve to suffer)

 Q: Is Job right? (answer: no! He is a sinner)

You may not want to do all of the following:

Job 8:1-7 Q: What is Bildad’s opinion? Why suffering?

Job 9:21-22 10:1-8 What is Job’s attitude? Q: How might we be like that?

Job 11:13-19 Q: What is Zophar’s opinion? Do you agree with him?

Job 13:13-19 (19:1-7) Job’s bold response. What is Job feeling?

Job 29:7-20, 31:1-12 Q: How would you describe Job’s position here?

Job 32:1-5 Q: Describe Elihu in a couple of words.

Job 33:8-26 Q: Why is Job suffering according to Elihu?

It seems that Elihu, of the five, is closest to getting the question of suffering correct. Interesting, since he is the young guy.

Job 38:1-15 Job challenges God and asks him why. Q: In essence, what is God’s answer? Did God answer the question?

Q: How does this apply to us (that God does not answer Job)? Q: How does this apply to Covid-19?

Summary: Job 40:1-2 Q: Why does God seem so harsh here?

Job 40:3-5 Q: What is Job thinking now?

Job 40:7-14 Just in case Job did not get the idea….

Job 42:1-6 Job repents. Q: What did Job learn? How does this apply to us?