**EHS The Problem of Suffering III**

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

Theme of Job:

Hanging on to everything (God) through anything.

Questions we all have:

Why is there evil in the world? Is God good?

Why is there suffering in the world?

Why do we (personally) suffer in a particular situation?

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

The story: Satan tells God that we only serve him because he gives us “stuff.”

God mentions Job and allows Satan to take away all of Job’s “stuff.”

Job says “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, may the name of the Lord be praised.

The ever-cynical Satan says, “skin for skin.” If you let me go after his body, he will deny you.

Again, despite an unsupportive wife, Job asks, “Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?”

A good question for us!

In all this, Job did not sin.

Job 2:11-13 Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. These guys are the ideal friends. They are sitting with Job and listening. They did not speak a word.

They sympathized. They comforted. They wept aloud with him.

The central question of the rest of Job is this: Why did Job suffer? Q: Why do we suffer?

 a. sin of others Exodus 34:6-7

 b. our own sin Exodus 34:6-7

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

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

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

 f. Without suffering there is no joy (Psalms 30:5)

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

Of these, why did Job suffer? Answer: d,e

Here is a question for us: Can you love a God you cannot control?

Job 3:1-25 Job is hurting.

v. 6 May that day be removed from the calendar.

v. 11 Why did I not perish at birth.

v. 25 What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.

He is discouraged. He is angry at God. He is depressed. He is crying out.

Is he sinning? Maybe. He is lamenting. (2/3 of Psalms, Lamentation)

Now, let’s look at Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Job asking themselves why?

As soon as they open their mouths…

Eliphaz: Job 4:1-9

v. 6 If you were really pious, as you say, and blameless, as you claim, you should be confident and hopeful, not discouraged and depressed.

v. 7-8 The innocent will not be destroyed.

v. 8 … those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. You are reaping what you sowed.

This could be… But how does Eliphaz know? He is assuming what is not true.

Thanks a lot, Eliphaz!

Implication: If you are suffering, it is because you are sinning—you are not as righteous as you think. Your loss and grief are because of your sin.

Perhaps we feel this. This suffering I am going through is my fault. God is getting back at me.

My husband is unfaithful, or I am being abused. It is my fault.

I have not been able to find a spouse. God is against me. No!!!

Not true! Eliphaz is wrong in this case. That we know because of Job 1 & 2.

(The Bible is inspired, but that does not mean it does not contain error)

Message: Let us be careful to judge ourselves and others!

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

Those homeless, alcoholics, poor people, etc. They brought it on themselves.

Those Muslims…. Those atheists… Let us withhold judgment.

Job’s response:

Job 6:1-3, If you were in my sandals, you would be impetuous as well. Come on, give me a break. How about a little support. Good point. We need empathy.

Job 6:14-21 v. 15 undependable like an intermittent stream.

v. 21 of no help. You have been lousy friends. Job is becoming bitter.

Then he addresses his suffering:

Job 6:22-30 I have been a great friend. I have always been righteous.

v. 24 show me where I have been wrong.

v. 28 Have I ever lied?

v. 30 there is no unrighteousness on my lips.

You say I deserve this. I do not deserve what is happening

I am sufficiently righteous that I should expect not to suffer in this way.

 7:17-21 (here he is talking to God, not the Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar)

v. 19 Can you please leave me alone!

v. If I have sinned… I have never sinned against you.

I do not deserve this.

This is all unfair.

God, I have suffered enough. God, why don’t you give me the job I want? God, why do I have this chronic illness? What did I do to deserve this?

Is this true? Is Job so innocent that he does not deserve God’s judgment?

Romans 3:10 There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands and who seeks God.

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law.

Ephesians 2:3 Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Job 8:1-7 Bildad agrees with Eliphaz.

v. 3 How dare you challenge God!

v. 4 your children got what they deserved.

v. 6 If you are pure and upright, if you stop sinning, God will restore you.

You are suffering because of your sin. Stop sinning (if you are pure and upright) and God will return to blessing you.

Have you ever felt this way? If I do enough good things, God will have to bless me.

It’s my turn for a blessing.

Bildad is wrong here.

Job 9:20-22 v. 21 I am blameless.

v. 22 God destroys the blameless and the wicked [equally].

This is all so unfair. God is not fair.

10:1-8

v. 2 What charge do you have against me? What have I done?

v. 3 You are being unfair. You treat the wicked better than me.

v. 7 You know that I am not guilty.

Have you ever felt something like this?

Let’s do what we did last week. Share with a neighbor a time you have felt God was being unfair or unjust toward you.

Then paraphrase what your neighbor said back to them without commenting or evaluating. Just listen and paraphrase.

Job 11:13-19 Zophar’s turn. He says the same thing. Repent and all this suffering will come to an end.

v. 13 If you are sufficiently devoted.

v. 14 If you stop sinning and repent.

v. 17 Then your life will be brighter than the noonday sun.

Job is thinking: Repent of what?

Job 13:13-19 Job’s bold response to Zophar.

v. 13 stop talking.

v. 15 I will defend myself before God to his face.

v. 18 I will be vindicated.

v. 19 No one can bring charges against me.

Job 29:7-20 Job: I am actually quite awesome. Is there a note of pride here?

I, I, I, I, I I did this, I did that, I was awesome.

Job has not learned empathy and compassion. God is teaching him something.

v. 18 I said to myself, I will have an unending string of blessings from God.

31:1-6 [-12] More of the same.

Job 30:16-23 Job is really in the spiritual dumps!!! He is doing some serious lamenting.

v. 19 God threw me in the mud.

v. 21 You turn on me ruthlessly.

v. 23 You are killing me. Wow!

Job 32:1-5

Eliju, the young guy, has been waiting in the wings.

Job: Your claim to be sufficiently righteous to justify unending blessings is wrong.

EB&Z You condemn him without cause—assuming all this is because of Job’s sin.

Job 33:8-27

v. 9 You said you are pure and have done no wrong to deserve this.

v. 12 Job, you are not right. You are not as righteous as you think.

v. 14 God’s ways are a mystery. God speaks in various subtle ways.

v. 26 If you are suffering you can pray to God.

v. 27 I have sinned, but still I feel this is not deserved.

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

Job 38:1-40:2 God asks Job 77 questions.

Job: 30 chapters of lament, 3 chapters of rhetorical questions, 1 chapter of answers.

Read 38:1-18

He does not answer Job’s question “Why?”

Even Eliju is wrong. God may not answer our questions.

God is unassailable.

What about Covid-19? Is this just a random natural event or is God trying to get our attention?

What about my mother’s cancer? What about this persecution?

God asks Job 77 questions.

Summary: Job 40:1-2 God: I am God. Will you be so bold and rash as to accuse me?

Job 40:3-5 Job is starting to get it.

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

Job 42:1-6 Job repents.

v. 3 God, I admit that your ways are mysterious.

From now on, I will simply trust in your ways, O God.

Job 42:5 Now I see God.

And by the way, Job 42:7-17 God blesses Job more than before, but now he understands God’s love. He is more resilient and has more capacity to show love and empathy to others.

Suffering, grief and loss are an opportunity to connect with God.

God gave all Job had and more, but Job is SO MUCH a better person. Much less self-pride, much more empathy. A much better friend and shepherd.

Suffering and loss are not proof that God does not love us or abandon us.

On the contrary, they are part of how God refines us. They are part of how we get to know God. That is what happened to Job.

But, when we suffer great loss, we will mourn, we will lament, and we will perhaps even blame God. It is OK to feel these things. Jesus felt exactly this way in the Garden. My father, why have you forsaken me.

We need to let those who grieve, grieve. We need to support them with our presence more than with our words.