

Finding Our Place In All Creation
Job 38:1-18

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Dr. J. Howard Olds

Parents of a college freshman received this letter from their daughter near the end of her first semester.

Dear Mom and Dad. Sorry I failed to write all semester, but college life has kept me really busy. About two months ago I was slightly injured in a car accident near the shopping mall. The injuries were not too serious and the paramedic was really nice. We went out a few times and he invited me to move in with him, which sure beats dorm life a lot. He's extremely smart even though he dropped out of high school. I really like his long hair and tattoos. The weekends are a real blast when we get high on drugs. I especially hope you like him since I may be expecting our first child soon. Love, Your daughter.

P.S. There was no accident, no paramedic, no love affair, no drugs, no baby. However, I am anticipating getting two D's and one F this semester. When my grades arrive, I wanted you to have things in proper perspective.

Life is a matter of maintaining proper perspective. There are things that cause us to lose perspective in life.

SUFFERING STUNS US.

Once upon a time in the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. Job was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. He had a perfect family of seven sons and three daughters. If you know Old Testament numbers, you know that arrives at a perfect number. He owned a perfect ranch and had plenty of stock. He was the greatest man among all the people who lived in the East.

Then one day all hell broke loose. The Sabeans stole his donkeys. The Chaldeans swiped his camels. Lightning struck his sheep. A tornado killed all ten of his children and their families. The shock was so intense that Job, himself, broke out in boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. The destruction devastated Job's wife so much that she encouraged him to curse God and die. Instead, Job argues with God and lives. You can say a lot about Job, but you cannot call him patient, even though your mothers and daddies talked about the "patience of Job." He was not patient at all. He was argumentative. He and God got into intense arguments. Nevertheless, this ancient story, one of the oldest pieces of the Old Testament, stands as an eternal witness that suffering happens. Sometimes it is profound and public. Sometimes it is personal and private. Never morning wears to evening but some heart breaks, a heart just as sensitive as yours and mine. The Twin Towers fall; the tumor is malignant; the child is dead; the spouse is gone.

A man went in for his annual physical. A couple of days later he got a phone call from his physician. "I've got bad news and even worse news," said the doctor. "The bad news is that you have only forty-eight hours to live." The stunned man said, "What could be worse than that?" The Doc said, "I've been trying to reach you since yesterday." When the storms of life are raging, it is easy to lose perspective. That's what the Book of Job is all about. Suffering stuns us.

SOMETIMES FRIENDS CONFUSE US.

Job had some friends who showed up to console him. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were their names. When they heard of Job's troubles they decided they would come and extend their sympathy. One thing they did right. The second Chapter of Job tells us that they came and for seven days and seven nights they sat with him and didn't say a word. They were just present. If you would like to know how to really be helpful to people in their moments of trouble, just sit with them in their sorrow.

It is when they started talking that they got into big trouble. When these three friends decided that they would make sense out of the senseless, explain the unexplainable, and defend God who seemed so feeble, they really got into trouble. They tried to give explanations about the events of life that are too awesome for any of us to understand or comprehend.

Eliphaz said, "*Job, you know, things like this just happen. Every vine needs to be pruned every now and then and cut back. You will be better because of this pain you are going through. Learn from it and go on.*"

Bildad said to Job in his sorrow, "*What else did you expect? These kids of yours have been partying every weekend. In fact, when the tornado hit they were in a big elaborate party . No wonder they got wiped out. God is not going to tolerate that kind of thing in life.*"

Zophar said, "*Job, everything has a reason and because everything has a reason and there is a time for every purpose under Heaven, don't ever be asking God why this happens. Just accept it; take it. It is a way of life.* To everyone of these explanations Job explodes in a tangent of arguments in response.

Eugene Peterson once said, "Sufferers attract fixers the way road-kill attracts vultures." Everybody wants to say something that will make everything all right. The earthquakes hit California and the Christians said, "What else did you expect in California? After all, with all the debauchery in the movie industry, they got what they deserved." The terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and Jerry Falwell went on Pat Robertson's 700 Club and said, "I really believe the pagans, the abortionists, the feminists, the gays, the lesbians, the ACLU, and the People for the American Way, all who have tried to secularize America—I point my finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.' The attacks are God's judgment

on America for throwing God out of the public square.”

As you read in your prayer concerns, Sandy and I buried our stillborn grandchild this week. Daniel Isaac was our hope who never came to be. For your prayers, compassion, and the great sense of community that we have received from you, we will be eternally and deeply grateful. Thank you so much for your spirit of caring and love. In the turmoil of these last ten days that led to his birth and burial, our children received an e-mail from someone they did not know, condemning the action they prayerfully decided to take. In his tears my son, who is a pastor himself, looked me in the eye and said, “Dad, may the Lord deliver me from the Christians.”

We lose perspective sometimes because we want to give simple answers to the pain of life. What do you do when perspective is lost? How do we regain it? I am not sure that I have an easy answer for you. That is not what the Book of Job is all about. There are a couple of things that go on in this great piece of literature that I think we could apply to our lives.

WE ARE CREATED.

How do we regain perspective when we have lost it? Two things happen in the story of Job. The first is that Job is shocked into the reality that he is the created and not the creator. We are made in the image of God. We are not God. It is a happy day when we discover that truth.

Not far from the place where I retreat to pray and play, a famous author and poet by the name of Wendell Berry does his writing. In one of his books he says, “When despair for the world grows in me, and I wake in the night in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things, who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water and I feel above me the day blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world and I am free.”

In this drama of human suffering, at last God speaks. In Chapters 38–42 of the Book of Job, we have the longest discourse heard from God in the entire Bible. You would think that God would come on with great compassion like a loving mother. Instead, He doesn’t explain; He explodes to Job.

Brace yourself like a man, Job; I have a few questions of my own. You want to know about Me? Let Me ask you a few questions. In fact, I will give a pop quiz on nature. (If you want to count them, there are about eighty questions altogether.) Where were you when the world was formed? Tell Me if you understand. Have you ever made the sun to rise or comprehended the vastness of space? Job, tell Me if you know all of this stuff. Can you explain the mystery of death or what is the way to the abode of light? If you’ve lived so long and know so much, how come you can’t explain this? Does the rain have a father, Job? From whose womb does the ice come? Job, about that behemoth, this

gigantic hippopotamus–like creature that lives in the minds of ancient people and the leviathan, this monstrous crocodile that your people believe to live in the sea, do you think you can subdue one of them with a sling shot or a fish hook? Who do you think you are, Job?

Job was stunned with silence. He then said, *“Surely I spoke of things I didn’t understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes see you and I am in awe.”*

C.S. Lewis once said the ancient man approached God as the accused person approaches a judge, but for modern man the roles are reversed. We are the judge. We put God on trial and we dare to say to God in the midst of our struggles, ‘By the way God, if You would oblige Yourself to explain suffering, pain, war, death, and disease, and You give an adequate explanation to all that I am going through, I might give You the honor of a little bit of my attention and my devotion.’

C.S. Lewis suggests the problem with that is that we have the wrong person in charge of the world.

WE HAVE A CREATOR.

You and I are God’s creation. We are not gods and the quicker we discover it, the better we will understand life. I may have a point of view, you may have a point of view, but God has a view. Let God be God. How do you gain perspective in the midst of life? You remember not only that you are created, you remember that you have a creator. God is watching us; God is watching us not from a distance, but God is working for us in the thick and thin of our existence.

We can quarrel with God, we can fight with God, we can make up with God, but whatever we do, we are never without God. God can handle your arguments. God can live with us through our despair. God can deal with our arrogance, but stay in there with God until you know the communion between the Creator and the created in your life.

Over the years we make a choice. I have been at this business long enough that I have watched people make the choice again and again. We curse God for the circumstances, or we invite God into the circumstances of our lives.

Two people break a hip and one feels hurt and full of heartache and the other feels helped and full of hope. We make a decision. Two couples have a handicapped child. One father cannot stand it and files for divorce. The other father thanks God for helping him understand the real value of family. We make a choice. Two people look out from prison bars. One sees mud, the other stars, says the poet. We decide our place in the rhythm of the universe.

“My grandpa says you learn most everything after you think you know it all,” says Dennis the Menace in a Hank Ketchum cartoon. What have you learned since you thought you knew it all? What have you discovered about life since you

thought you had it all nailed down and figured out? Sometimes we learn the most after we think we know it all.

Somebody asked the American historian, Charles A. Beard, if he could write down the great lessons of life in a small book. He replied, "I can put it in four sentences." Here is what he said:

"Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad with power. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small. The bee fertilizes the flower it robs. When it's dark enough, you can see the stars."

*So on I go not knowing, I would not if I might
I would rather walk in the dark with God
Than walk alone in the light.
I would rather walk with God by faith
Than walk alone by sight.*

Amen.

