

Sermon 08-24-2025
 Friendship in Suffering – Rev. Markus Wegenast
 Job 2:11-13

¹¹ Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. ¹² When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. ¹³ They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

1)

Jenny just found out that one of her best friends had a tragic motorbike accident and lost his leg. She's so very sorry for him. She is on her way to see him, completely stressed out about what to say when she sees him for the first time. On her way to the hospital, she stops at her church. She wants to have a quick talk with Robert, the care team coordinator, to see if he would have some words of advice for her. By the time she's in Robert's office she is even more stressed: "I can't do this. I don't know what to say to make this any less painful for my friend." Robert looks at her calmly and says: "Why are you worried about what to say to your suffering friend, don't you care for this poor young man?" Jenny says: "Of course I do, we've been friends since kindergarten. I love him dearly, I just have no idea what to say." Robert responds: "You don't know what to say? Good, you're best suited then, go to the hospital already..."

(9:30 service > do self-intro and point out series)

Today we are looking at an uncomfortable but important aspect of friendship. If you're a true friend you are not only there in the good times, you are also willing to be there in the bad times. In fact, isn't it one of the great testimonies of true friendship when we are able to be friends in tough times, when we don't just have fun with our friends? With some of your friends you may be fortunate and never run into tough situations, but typically, when you've a friend for a long time chances are there will also be hardship.

For Jenny the moment of truth came when her good childhood friend had a motorbike accident and lost his leg. I'm sure there were a million thoughts running through her head and heart. Maybe even the thought to quit the friendship. Have you ever been in such a situation where you thought it would be easier to withdraw from a relationship because things are a little hard? That was the situation Jenny was in but in the end her heart told her she can't quit on her friend now.

Isn't it interesting that the care team coordinator of her church said all she needed was to really care for her friend? The words are secondary...

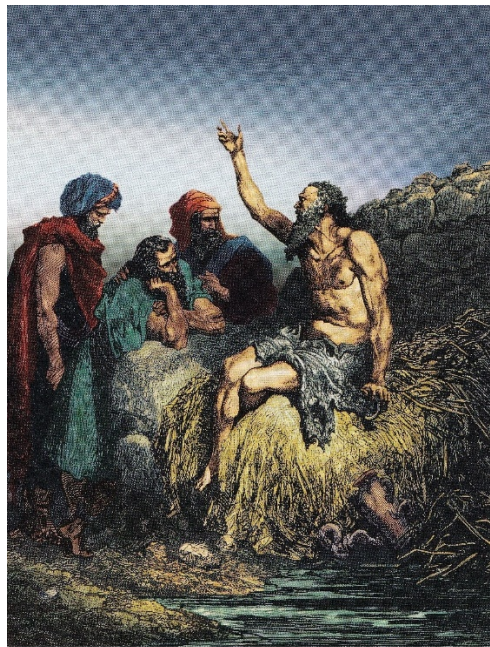
There are many friendships in the Bible that show us how true friends help each other out when times get bad. I want to look with you at the curious friendship of a man named Job. He had three friends. We can learn and unlearn a lot from them:

The book of Job in the Old Testament is a long, difficult book that deals with the question of why there is suffering in the world, especially the suffering of innocent, good people. Job was such a person. He was morally upright, very successful at what he did, had a great family and friends until one day when everything fell apart. Everything! His kids died, his wealth disappeared, and his own health went downhill to the point that his body looked disfigured and crushed. He didn't do anything to deserve this – he was a good person. Why, why him?

The story of his suffering spreads and soon his three friends find out about it. They decide to go visit with Job and this is where today's passage from the Bible picks up:

Job 2:11-13

It's pretty amazing what those three friends of Job do.



I don't know how far they had to travel, maybe they were next door neighbors, maybe they came from afar, it is impressive none the less what they would do. They sat with their friend for an entire week. They didn't say anything, they just sat with him and shared his burden!

Galatians 6:2 says "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." That's exactly what these OT friends of Job did. They weren't passive by not saying anything – they were right where they needed to be, fully present to their friend Job's suffering. There wasn't anything they could say that would make Job's situation any less painful. All they could do is be with him and in this way share his load – just sitting with him.

Do you have friends that will do this for you? Do you have friends that are willing to share your burden when you are going through a hard time?

Are you the kind of friend who is willing to do that?

It's hard not to worry about what you should say when someone is going through a hard time. I have done countless hospital visits as a pastor and seen many people at their homes when they were sick or going through a hard time or were dying, but every time it is a new challenge for me not to worry about what meaningful thing I should say but rather be in the moment. Of course I talk when I visit with people, of course I hope that my words are somehow meaningful – but I have to learn again and again that in the end it's not the words, it's the presence that allows for God to bring healing.

Job's friends *"... raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. ¹³ They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great."*

That is true friendship!

But now the story shifts...

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2)

After 7 days of being comforted by his friends Job himself feels ready to speak up. He's the first to talk - and the friends have a hard time with what he says.

Job starts complaining, he is speaking his heart out to the point that he curses the day he was born. He challenges God to finally end this injustice and let him die... Job's friends can't stand it any longer to be silent comforters. And here is what happens:

The friends open their mouths and start giving "good" advice!

The bulk of the book of Job now is lengthy speeches of Job's friends. They are smart cookies, they know religion, they know philosophy, they know how to engage in debate - and so that's what they do. They enter into a debate with Job about the theology of suffering.

It's all correct statements they make. But they don't help. They are trying to find the sins that Job committed that caused his suffering. That was good orthodox theology at the time. (And if you think about it, we probably still do that today...)

Job's friends are determined to solve a dilemma: a righteous man does not suffer, there must be something going on in his life that offended God. But the thing is: It doesn't help suffering Job to have three friends surrounding him trying to figure out what he did wrong to deserve his misery!

He needs comfort like during the first week when his friends just sat with him and focused on being present for him in his suffering. Instead now he is confronted with three friends that switched from being burden sharers to accusers: They are trying to find a *reason* why Job is suffering.

That is not what a person that suffers needs. When you suffer it is normal that you ask the “why?” question. I’m sure you all have been there. I’m sure every single one of us has wondered why certain things happen, why we have to go through a hard time or why someone else has to go through a hard time. That is normal.

But it’s not really an explanation we want when we wonder the “why?” question, what we want is God! Ask yourself, when you are suffering, what do you really need?

When you’re going through a hard time: Do you long for an explanation for why you suffer or do you long for God?!

Even though Job suffered greatly and was upset with God, he wanted God, he needed God. He was mad at God but his faith and trust in God never went away. In this Job becomes a real role model for us. It’s ok to be mad at God, God can handle it. The question is: Can we handle it when our friends speak their heart out? Job’s friends couldn’t. They started to give him advice, they became defensive, they even turned against him. It didn’t help.

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Let’s leave Job and his friends behind now and turn to us. We all know what it’s like to go through a hard time and we probably all have had friends who go through a hard time. Chances are that God desires for you to be a person who is there when your friend goes through a hard time. And let’s just acknowledge it:

It’s hard to be a good friend when situations are tough.

I could imagine that for you it is not so much the concern that you engage in a theological and philosophical debate on suffering with your friend like the three friends of Job did.

But I want to say that the principle of what they did when they broke their silence applies to all of us. It’s hard to be fully present to a person that isn’t doing well, especially when that person complains like Job did.

I remember a time when I was in my early twenties. I had two good friends and one of them went through a bad breakup with a girlfriend. They had been together for many years and it was one of those sad, ugly break ups.

My friend was grieving for a long time, I can’t tell you how many times my other friend and I had to sit there and listen to him lament.

It got really tiring, especially because the lament always followed the same pattern: “Why did she break up with me? What did I do wrong? Why won’t she give us another try?”...

Because these questions came with such regularity it was hard to be empathetic. We were by far not the perfect listeners every time he lamented, there was a lot of eye rolling going on when our friend started his sadness rants. “Here we go again...!”

There were times when we grew impatient and told him that he too has to realize that there were things he did wrong for that relationship to end. A good friendship can handle that and let’s face it: Sometimes it is necessary to say something and even to give advice or correction. No doubt about that. Sometimes you have to speak the truth even when it hurts. (...)

I’m telling you this because I want to recognize that life is complicated and we can’t always do what Job’s three friends did during the first week when they just sat in silence and comforted Job through their presence.

But I hope we allow God to teach us a lesson today. I hope you find encouragement in the story of Job and his friends to be a true friend who is willing to share the load of someone who suffers. Here is what it comes down to:

Allow God to help you resist (that natural human desire) **desiring to say something profound and instead solely focus on the needs of your suffering friend**

Don’t beat yourself up when you feel it’s hard not to worry about what to say. It is normal to focus on ourselves when we are confronted with the hard time a friend is going through.

[E.g. a visitation at a funeral. There is a document called “19 worst things to say to a person in mourning.” I’m attaching it to the bottom of my sermon if you want to check it out on our web site...]

Sometimes all we need to say is “I’m so sorry” – and in the awkward silence to follow you help your friend carrying a burden.

As far as Job’s story in the OT goes: God eventually shows up. After chapters, and chapters of arguing and debate and another friend arriving God finally speaks up. We don’t learn why God waited that long – just like in our lives we don’t always find out why God is the way he is. But again, when it comes to our suffering it’s not about finding out answers – it’s about finding God.

May you find God when you have the opportunity to be there for a friend who is going through a hard time. May you find that God is with you to kindle your love and to empower you to be a true friend. Amen.

<https://www.amenclinics.com/blog/19-worst-things-to-say-to-a-grieving-person/>

19 WORST THINGS TO SAY TO A PERSON IN MOURNING

To help you understand what typically comes off as hurtful rather than helpful, here are 19 things Amen Clinics patients said they wish people would stop saying to someone who's grieving.

1. "How are you doing?" [When asked casually]
2. "You'll be okay after a while."
3. "I understand how you feel."
4. "You shouldn't feel that way."
5. "Stop crying."
6. "At least he's in a better place. His suffering is over."
7. "At least she lived a long life. Many people die young."
8. "She brought this on herself."
9. "Aren't you over him yet, he's been dead for a while now."
10. "There is a reason for everything."
11. "God's in charge."
12. "She was such a good person. God wanted her to be with Him."
13. "Just give it time. Time heals." (Time does not heal, taking the right steps heals.)
14. "You're young. You can still have other children."
15. "You'll do better next time in love."
16. "It was just a dog (or cat). You can get another one."
17. "Stay busy. Don't think about it."
18. "You have to be strong for your spouse, children, mother, etc." (This diminishes their need to take time to heal.)
19. "Just move on."

13 HELPFUL THINGS TO SAY TO (OR DO FOR) A GRIEVING PERSON

Based on what thousands of Amen Clinics patients have said, here are better ways to communicate and connect with someone who's in mourning.

1. "I'm so sorry for your loss."
2. "I wish I had the right words. Please know I care, and I'm here for you."
3. "You and your loved ones are in my prayers."
4. "I can't imagine how you feel." Then be quiet and let them tell you about their feelings.
5. "I can't imagine how you feel. When I lost my father I felt" Then listen without judgment or criticism.
6. "I'm here for you." Better yet, if there is something specific they need, ask if you can do it for them. Ask if you can make phone calls or send emails on their behalf.
7. "Can I go to the funeral?" This is often an important sign of support.
8. "Want to talk about what happened?" Many people avoid this question, but it helps the griever to explain it, if they desire, and having a compassionate ear can help them process it more accurately.
9. Just be present.
10. Share a memory about the person who's gone.
11. Be empathetic. It's okay for you to show your feelings.
12. Continue connecting, even after a few months. Many people are inundated in the first few weeks, but they need support long after the funeral is over.