

Introduction

It is easy to believe that God is present and caring when things are going well. It is much more difficult to believe that God cares when everything goes wrong. When we need Him most, He seems strangely silent and distant.

After the tragic loss of his wife to cancer, the great Christian apologist C. S. Lewis wrote these words:

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be — or so it feels — welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.

(C. S. Lewis, "A Grief Observed" Harper, San Francisco, 1961.)

Job had similar feelings during his days of affliction, as we will see in chapter 30.

For discussion: *What similar experiences have you had, and how did **you** feel toward God?*

Read verses 1-8

Q: *To whom is Job referring in these verses?*

A: He is referring to whom some would call "losers." These are worthless fellows who are scoundrels, rogues, rascals, lazy, wicked, and with too much time on their hands. They are the "undisciplined" and "fools" of Proverbs. (cf Proverbs 1:10-19)

Q: *Why is he so upset by them?*

A: They are saying about him, "See, you're no better than we are. You're just as bad off, if not worse. Your efforts to be a good and righteous man have gained you nothing. All your efforts to be good were for naught."

Application: *We can feel distant **spiritually** when we begin to think we should be better off than **others**.*

¹“But now those younger than I mock me,
Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.
²Indeed, what good was the strength of their hands to me?
Vigor had perished from them.
³From want and famine they are gaunt
Who gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation,
⁴Who pluck mallow by the bushes,
And whose food is the root of the broom shrub.
⁵They are driven from the community;
They shout against them as against a thief,
⁶So that they dwell in dreadful valleys,
In holes of the earth and of the rocks.

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⁷Among the bushes they cry out;
Under the nettles they are
gathered together.

⁸Fools, even those without a
name,
They were scourged from the
land.

⁹“And now I have become their
taunt,
I have even become a byword to
them.

¹⁰They abhor me and stand aloof
from me,
And they do not refrain from
spitting at my face.

¹¹Because He has loosed His
bowstring and afflicted me,
They have cast off the bridle
before me.

¹²On the right hand their brood
arises;
They thrust aside my feet and
build up against me their
ways of destruction.

¹³They break up my path,
They profit from my
destruction;

No one restrains them.

¹⁴As through a wide breach they
come,

Amid the tempest they roll on.

¹⁵Terrors are turned against me;
They pursue my honor as the
wind,

And my prosperity has passed
away like a cloud.

Read verses 9-15

Q: What is Job protesting here?

A: Job is protesting that he is a righteous individual and those who are mocking him, demeaning him and apparently victorious over him are wicked. Who does this remind us of? The clear paradox here is that the righteous are being treated as wicked and the wicked are apparently the victors. Compare this with the cross of Christ.

At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. “He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

Matthew 27:38-44

Application: We can feel distant **spiritually** when we feel we are being treated as the **wicked** should be who appear to be better off than **us**.

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¹⁶“And now my soul is poured
 out within me;
 Days of affliction have seized
 me.
¹⁷At night it pierces my bones
 within me,
 And my gnawing pains take no
 rest.
¹⁸By a great force my garment is
 distorted;
 It binds me about as the collar of
 my coat.
¹⁹He has cast me into the mire,
 And I have become like dust and
 ashes.
²⁰I cry out to You for help, but
 You do not answer me;
 I stand up, and You turn Your
 attention against me.
²¹You have become cruel to me;
 With the might of Your hand
 You persecute me.
²²You lift me up to the wind and
 cause me to ride;
 And You dissolve me in a storm.
²³For I know that You will bring
 me to death
 And to the house of meeting for
 all living.

Psalm 22

¹My God, my God, why have You
 forsaken me?
 Far from my deliverance are the
 words of my groaning.
²O my God, I cry by day, but You
 do not answer;
 And by night, but I have no rest.
³Yet You are holy,
 O You who are enthroned upon
 the praises of Israel.
⁴In You our fathers trusted;
 They trusted and You delivered
 them.

Read verses 16-23 & Psalm 22:1-8

Q: Again, what are the comparisons between Job’s experience, the psalmist’s experience, and Christ’s, realizing that Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm (that is, one that refers to the Messiah, the Christ)? How does this reflect on Christ’s suffering?

A: If Christ suffered on the cross and that suffering is foreshadowed in Psalm 22, which seems to parallel Job’s suffering, then we can conclude that Christ’s suffering was identical. As with Job, Jesus experienced God’s silence and apparent absence while on the cross.

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Matthew 27:46

For Discussion:

- How does this feeling of rejection or abandonment by God affect people who are suffering?
- Do Christians sometimes feel like God has abandoned them, especially when they have sought to be “good Christians”?
- How do Christians deal with that feeling that God has either turned against them or is ignoring them?
- How do we counsel people who feel this way when they’re suffering?

Point: When we’re suffering or going through any trial or affliction, we turn to God for help. The help we’re really looking for is escape from the pain of affliction, whether it be physical, mental or emotional. But when we seek God for a direct response or intervention, there often appears to be silence. [“Why, God, won’t you answer my prayers?”] That’s the sense of abandonment or rejection. The only thing that will enable us to remain secure in our relationship with God during trials, affliction and suffering is to have our faith so grounded in that relationship that even pain or affliction can’t shake it.

Though He slay me
 I will hope in Him.
 Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.
 Job 13:15

Q: Referring to verses 16-23, what is the dominant emotion most people feel when they are in the midst of affliction? How does an afflicted person feel when he or she is in the midst of a trial, and how should the Christian offer counsel?

A: The dominant emotion facing the afflicted person is fear; fear of losing health, fear of losing loved ones, fear of losing control, fear of losing companionship, respect, things of value, status, job, income, time, et cetera. The best counsel a Christian can offer is to try to understand, empathize and sympathize with the person’s fears. The

⁵To You they cried out and were delivered;
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

⁶But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.

⁷All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,

⁸“Commit yourself to the LORD;
let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”

best way to do that is to not leave them alone in their fears. Therefore, the best comfort offered is not through words but through companionship.

For Discussion: Discuss the observation that trees, if grown in an environment where there is no wind, break easily at the first strong gust. How does this relate to Christians and suffering? (The meaning is clear. Trees, especially tall ones like palm trees, must be exposed to wind while growing in order to be able to withstand strong winds when the tree is taller. The fibers of the palm tree are strengthened each time they are exposed to the wind. Therefore, it is the little trials of life that prepare us and strengthen us for the larger, more severe trials in life.)

For Discussion: There is a proverb that says, “You can’t learn to sail a boat in the middle of a storm.” How does this proverb apply to the subject of Christian affliction? (The proverb is stating that one must master the art of sailing a boat when the weather is good, when the wind is calm and seas are smooth. During a storm, it is difficult to keep a boat on course, as the boat is tossed about by the wind and the waves. Also, special skills and tenacity are required in a storm that aren’t required during smooth sailing. Therefore, the basic skills of ship handling must be mastered before the more difficult skills of sailing in a storm are encountered. To the Christian, the meaning is this: Christians need to be constantly involved with God in Bible study, prayer and fellowship so that when everything goes wrong, their faith is strong and ready to endure the trial.)

Application: When **Christ** experienced God’s **silence**. (Mt. 27:6) What is often needed most is not a **sermon** but **companionship**.

24“Yet does not one in a heap of
ruins stretch out his hand,
Or in his disaster therefore cry
out for help?
25Have I not wept for the one
whose life is hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the
needy?
26When I expected good, then
evil came;
When I waited for light, then
darkness came.
27I am seething within and
cannot relax;
Days of affliction confront me.
28I go about mourning without
comfort;
I stand up in the assembly and
cry out for help.
29I have become a brother to
jackals
And a companion of ostriches.
30My skin turns black on me,
And my bones burn with fever.
31Therefore my harp is turned
to mourning,
And my flute to the sound of
those who weep.

Read verses 24-31

Q: People, even Christians, often become depressed when going through a trial or experiencing grief. Why is it not a good idea to try to talk them out of their depression? Even worse, what’s wrong with telling them they need more faith?

A: Depression is a normal response to facing the issues and dealing with reality. Unless reality is faced, final acceptance of the circumstances will never happen. If acceptance is never achieved, there will be no growth through the trial. Telling people to have more faith doesn’t work because many Christians believe they have maintained good faith and God has nevertheless turned against them.

Application: It is most often an issue of endurance, not a shortage of faith.

For Final Discussion

Researchers have identified six stages of reaction to grief or sudden loss. They are listed below. As time allows, discuss each one, apply each to Job’s situation, and then have others apply them to their own experiences.

Stages of grief:

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

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