

Where Can Wisdom Be Found?

Why do people go to college? When you ask that question, most people say something about "...getting a better job." Is that the purpose of college? I read an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education recently that said that there are 17 million students with college degrees in this country doing jobs that require no more than a middle school education. For example, there are 317,759 waiters and waitresses with college degrees and 8,000 of them have PhDs! If people are going to college to get a better paying job, according to the Chronicle for Higher Education, it hasn't exactly worked out so well for 17 million of them. ⁱ

But according to Yale University law professor, Anthony Kronman, that's not really what students are looking for in a college experience. Kronman says that students are exhibiting a "growing hunger" to explore "questions of spiritual urgency." What incoming students want are "courses that address the big questions of life, in all their sprawling grandeur..." Unfortunately, what Kronman sees is that the professors have "ceased to think of themselves as shapers of souls." Nowhere, he says, will these students study the meaning of life. American colleges have so embraced a research-driven model of scholarship, that metaphysical interests, once the subject matter of the humanities, have been all but eliminated from higher education. ⁱⁱ

We are now topically at the halfway mark in Job's story. Before the last two counselors appear, Job shares with us his life priorities as they have now been forged by his difficult experiences. Before we hear his priorities, we need to examine those bigger questions, namely, "Why does God allow suffering in the first place?" So, let's spend some time examining...

I. The Crucible of Suffering

A crucible is the container in which metals are melted to liquid so that they can be purified and then poured into some useful form. Let me repeat that. A crucible is a container in which metals are melted to liquid so that they can be purified and then poured into some useful form. By definition, suffering is not pleasant. Why would God allow His spiritual children to experience intense pain? Well, what is God's goal for your life and how might His goal differ from YOUR goal in life? Most people's goals are to achieve and create and have a positive impact on our world. Is there anything wrong with goals like that? No, not necessarily. But how many of us would say that our number one goal is to know God better? Or who among us would say that our goal is to have our life melted down so that it could be poured into a more useful form by God?

Scott Haferman, in his book, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith*, says that the fundamental lesson of the book of Job is quite simple: our sole hope and only anchor in the midst of suffering or prosperity is knowing God and God alone in his sovereignty and grace. This means then, that the primary purpose in suffering is to make God more fully known to us.

This is not a pleasant answer to the question of why does God allow suffering? Why would God use something that hurts as a means of deepening our relationship with Him?

C. S. Lewis once was asked to write a book on the topic of suffering. He wrote the book, entitled, *"The Problem of Pain,"* but in the preface he made this acknowledgement:

No one can say, "He jests at scars who never felt a wound," for I have never for one moment been in a state of mind to which even the imagination of serious pain was less than intolerable. ...the only purpose of this book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified... ⁱⁱⁱ

Twenty years later, God decided to qualify him. Lewis had married late in life and the woman who had brought him so much Joy, (named Joy), died a slow death of a debilitating disease. Lewis then wrote from a different perspective:

He [God] always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down... My idea of God was not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. God shatters it himself. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of his presence? ...And only suffering could do it.^{iv}

Suffering forces us to let go of our all-consuming schedule and stop and consider eternal questions. It brings us face to face with the question, "How well do I know God?" Job's grand conclusion at the end of this book is to say to God:

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. (Job 42:5)

Suffering had accomplished what health and wealth could not.

But it has a second impact on our lives. Suffering also gives people incredible focus and even a new and profoundly godly purpose in life. We might even receive a power from God that we could not handle before. Amy Carmichael was a missionary to India who suffered enormously in her life. She made this observation:

I have noticed that when one who has not suffered draws near to one in pain, there is rarely much power to help. I have wondered if it can be the same in the sphere of prayer. Does pain accepted and endured give some quality that would otherwise be lacking in prayer? What if every stroke of pain, or hour of weariness or loneliness, or any other trial of flesh or spirit, could carry us a pulse beat nearer some other life, some life for which the ministry of prayer is needed. Would it not be worthwhile to suffer? Ten thousand times yes. And surely it must be so, for the further we are drawn into the fellowship of Calvary with our dear Lord, the [more tender] we are toward others. God never wastes His children's pain.^v

So, the suffering is not just for you, it is for you to have the full power of Jesus Christ in order to release that power to others. God wants to know us deeply and unleash His power through us for the benefit of others. It is only through suffering that those two realities can be experienced at full power. Secondly, we need to see...

II. This Crucible's Impact on Job's Life

As we said at the beginning, we are halfway through the topics regarding Job's situation. Job spends these two chapters, 27 and 28, re-thinking the priorities

of his own life. Have you done that recently... or ever? We did it this past year in Men's Fraternity. We created what we called our "Sacred Ground" map. We made six lists of goals, things we felt God was calling us to accomplish before we died. Those six lists were on these life topics:

- **Who we want to be** (forgiven, a better husband, more of a giver than a taker)
- **What we want to do** (go salmon fishing in Canada, re-build an old friendship, disciple a new believer)
- **What we want to have** (a single-digit golf handicap, a reputation as a faithful friend, a solid relationship with Christ)
- **How, whom or what we want to help** (my children become independent adults, my parents in their time of need, bring clean water to a village in Africa)
- **What we want to enjoy** (grand children!, my job, kayaking on a moonlit lake in the wilderness with my wife)
- **What we want to leave** (a good name, legacy of faith, great memories)

This is what Job is led to do as a result of his suffering. We see four priorities emerge in Job's discourse in these chapters. The first is his highest goal, which is *to think God's thoughts*.

...as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit.
(Job 27:3-4)

Job's life is in complete meltdown – he's bankrupt, his children are dead, he has huge marriage problems and his physical life is on the ropes. What would you be thinking about God if you were in Job's place? Here's my conclusion from 38 years of ministry experience – what you think about God in the darkness is determined by what you think about Him in the daylight. People who curse God in the darkness are the ones who didn't think all that highly of Him in the daylight. But those people who truly worshipped God in the good days, were the ones who said with Job in the darkness:

Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him... (Job 13:15)

So, do you want the strength and perseverance of Job when your life turns dark? Then, make your relationship with Him now your highest priority. That's what Job did.

Secondly, we hear Job declare that *walking in integrity is the only way to live*.
**I will never admit you are in the right;
till I die, I will not deny my integrity.
I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it;
my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.** (Job 27:5, 6)

One thing Job's friends have taught him is that friends can be wrong. On the one hand, what we should learn from Job is how important friends are. But on the other hand, we should also learn how misleading they can be.

When I was younger and more susceptible to the plague of younger generations, the dreaded black death of peer pressure, I wrote a song about that struggle. The first verse went like this:

You say you have faith in your friendships,

*Their madness need not be cured.
Then you come to me speaking of sadness,
Expecting to be reassured.
How long will you live in the twilight,
Half seeing day, half seeing night.
You know where to go and you know where to find it,
You know that your friends are blocking the light.*

Because of his experience with his friends, Job committed himself to live by the truth, no matter what his friends tried to tell him.

The third priority Job took from this part of his life was an understanding that, *wrong will happen but it won't win*. Job speaks of the ultimate outcome for the wicked in verses 16 through 19. In The Message it reads this way:

**Even if they make a lot of money
and are resplendent in the latest fashions,
It's the good who will end up wearing the clothes
and the decent who will divide up the money.** (Job 27:16-17 The Message)

Job's commitment is to not become distraught or discouraged when he sees evil winning. This is a categorically different understanding of the world from his friends. His friends deny that evil CAN win. Job sees the truth. Evil DOES win in this world. Bad people sometimes live long lives filled with despicable deeds.

Mick Jagger has been one of the worst role models for young people that this world has ever seen. His drug use and relational sins are in perfect harmony with the messages in his music and this has gone on for decades. He produced an entire album dedicated to Satan! Yet, he has lived a long life of great wealth and basically good health. Job's friends would contend that this is impossible. Job acknowledges that it IS possible but in the end, in the framework of eternity, this kind of evil will NOT win. Job is not discouraged by that. He is mature enough to not be threatened by the Mick Jagers of this world but in fact, to pray for them, that they too might be saved.

Job's fourth priority answers the question asked by our sermon title today. From his experience in the crucible of suffering, Job learned that *it is only through a holy fear of God that we will ever find real wisdom*.

**But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?
God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells,
For he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the
heavens...
...then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
he confirmed it and tested it.**

**And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord - that is wisdom,
And to shun evil is understanding.'** (Job 28: 12, 23-24, 27-28)

Chuck Swindoll gives a great definition of wisdom that we all can understand. He says, "Wisdom is looking at life from God's point of view." Do you understand what that means? That means that there's no such thing as wisdom which disagrees with the Bible on any topic - not just ethics, but the sciences, psychology, finances, relationships, learning, how to discipline your children, how to relate to your boss...

No matter what the topic, wisdom is looking at that issue from God's point of view. Anything else, ANYTHING ELSE is UNWISE. That's what Job is saying. Do you agree with him or do you think that some stuff in the Bible is a little kooky? Where did Job learn this? He learned it the hard way, in the crucible of suffering. If this truth works there, where it's very hard to even breathe, believe me, it will work anywhere. So finally, we need to ask...

III. How Will the Crises of Life Shape My Priorities?

Lisa Beamer's life collapsed around her in one day, very much like Job's did. Lisa is the widow of Todd Beamer, the passenger on United flight 93 on 9/11 who, when he understood that terrorists had hijacked their plane, gathered a group of passengers and stormed the cockpit with the battle cry, "Let's roll!" As we know now, in the struggle that followed, the plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Lisa was left with two toddlers and pregnant with their third. When her worst fears were confirmed on that Tuesday, Lisa screamed at the television, "No," then in her own words, she says:

"Suddenly I felt as though my body weighed a million pounds; it seemed my heart might explode. I fell to my hands and knees and gasped again, "No!" ...I made my way to my bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed... I didn't move; I didn't speak. It was as though time had come to an abrupt halt, and I no longer existed... I was numb. I could see and hear, yet I simply continued to stare straight ahead." ^{vi}

In the book Lisa wrote entitled, *Let's Roll!*, she gives the details of how Christian friends, her family and the foundation of her relationship with Jesus and her late husband Todd, all worked over time to deepen some of her priorities in life, like being a great mom to her kids. They also gave her new priorities that she would then need to make it through the challenges ahead. But listen to what Lisa wrote on the last page of this book written just one year after the meltdown of 9/11:

My life since September 11 includes many human sorrows and challenges, and every day I must choose how to confront them. I can sink into depression or anger or anxiety, or I can trust that God is working everything for my good. I have chosen to believe God, to believe he loves me and has a plan for now and for eternity... The road ahead is uncertain and even scary at times, but I believe that God will provide what's best for me, just when I need it... I try to appreciate my blessings every day.

Of course the three sweetest gifts are often gathered on my lap. To them, "Let's roll!" is not a slogan, a book, or a song; it's a lifestyle. A lifestyle Todd and I began together... and one my children and I will carry on...

One day before Christmas, just a few months after Todd's death, I was halfheartedly unpacking some holiday decorations. Evidently I wasn't moving fast enough for David, (her 4-year-old)... So he looked at me and, in a playful voice... said, "Come on, Mom! Let's roll!"

I fought back the tears for a moment, and then said with a little grin, "You're right, David. Let's roll!" *It is well... it is well... with my soul.* ^{vii}

...where can wisdom be found?

The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom... (Job 28: 12, 28)

Let's pray...

ⁱ Richard Vedder, "Why Did 17 Million Students Go to College?", *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, Oct. 20, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Anthony Kronman, "Why We are Here? Colleges ignore life's biggest question and we all pay the price," *Boston Globe* (9-16-07) p. D1

ⁱⁱⁱ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1973), p. 9, 10

^{iv} Lewis quote from Scot Haferman, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 160-162

^v Michael Bauman, Lawrence Kimbrough, Martin I. Klauber and Keith P. Wells, *90 Days with the Christian Classics* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999)

^{vi} Lisa Beamer, *Let's Roll* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2002), p. 10, 11

^{vii} *Ibid.* p. 312