

2. What is care?

Series: Job – suffering and prayer

Date: 15 January 2023

Location: St George's Battery Point

Preacher: Jackie Law

Texts: Job 15:1-13, 16:1-5

- Job's friends 1. Show up, 2. Sit down, 3. Shut up
 - speeches; polyphony on retribution theology; stalemate
 - meet the need that facilitates honest human relationship with Creator God
 - manage your own (massive) anxiety in the face of catastrophe
 - *never* attempt to explain/justify someone's suffering; I would add, don't offer any opinion (e.g. minimising, relativising, or optimising) that is not consistent with your friend's lived experience of suffering, and don't let them do that either!
 - hope is not found in the midst of grief; aim for 'good grief'
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Intro: words, words, words

this week, we meet Job and his friends in the middle of their speeches; Job is talking like he has a case against God in their retributive justice system, but his friends won't have it, and they're right; growing annoyance with more than a hint of disrespect

this was never a rational debate; Job is in inordinate emotional and spiritual pain

the friends steadily lose sight of what they there for: to bring sympathy and comfort

going to look at what that is; how we easily get it wrong, too; what is care?

Pray: universal experience of wanting to help a hurting friend; not knowing what to say or

saying the wrong thing; how to keep going when the problems don't go away

seek your wisdom

strength for preaching

Interlude: thanks for care provided

encourage to keep doing that, especially for the people who may yet be strangers to you

create a culture where it's acceptable to make your needs known, ask for help

1. everybody hurts, sometimes:

- a. pain insists on being attended to (megaphone?)
- b. emotional/spiritual pain; focus on grief and loss; not just bereavement
- c. we all express pain uniquely
 - i. some will cry quietly/sob uncontrollably/never cry
 - ii. some will readily verbalise what they are feeling, while others like to keep it in
 - iii. some want to 'do something' when they are hurting, while others would prefer to sit down with a friend over coffee

- d. determine the unique style and relate to them with a style that fits *them*, not one that best fits you; gives them permission to respond in their own way; forges a strong relationship where you will be able to truly hear and understand

2. what the friends do well:

- a. show up – ‘you’re not alone’
- b. sit down – ‘what’s happened is serious’
- c. keep quiet – ‘the only words that matter right now are yours’; if you listen well enough you’ll hear them name the problem; often listening for their distress, not their actual words; need to manage your own anxiety

3. calm to comfort: 3 anchors

- a. you are powerless: you can’t fix the problem; God can, you just can’t say if he will; pray that you will not fall into temptation, i.e. abandon the belief that God is good and God has the power to heal
- b. you are powerful: you can lighten the load; presence; empathy: if you haven’t been handled well when in pain in the past, think through what you would have liked (often this is simply validation)
- c. aim is to facilitate ‘good grief’: *honest* human relationship with Creator God; this will upset you because it seems undignified, ungrateful, unspiritual; affirm every honest word or action; disregard everything else

4. what the friends descend to: they take offence at Job’s words in ch. 3; they prefer

rightness to relationship

they lose their ability to maintain compassion or withhold judgement

they talk about God but never to him

5. word traps for caring Christians:

- a. attempting to explain/justify someone’s suffering – God wants you to learn...
- b. having an expectation of how this will or should resolve –
- c. minimising – it’s not so bad
- d. relativising – it’s not as bad as...
- e. optimising – look at the good thing that has come out of it (silver linings)
- f. instead, can you stay curious? impartial? focussed on the one you’re there to comfort? can you pray?

6. hope: people can’t live without hope - *Job mentions it thirteen times*

the question is ‘on what is your hope founded?’

hope does not co-exist with grief, it follows it - ‘weeping may stay for the night but rejoicing comes in the morning’ (Ps 30:5)

don’t rush your friend into hope; grief is important work

Pray:

Study

2. What is care?

What are some of the features of 'good care' that you've experienced when you've been in emotional/spiritual pain?

What are some of the joys and frustrations of caring for someone in emotional/spiritual pain?

Consider some of the ways in which people may mask their pain or even not feel pain when we expect they might, e.g. say they are fine, say they don't really feel anything in particular, overspiritualise the event, become easily irritated or angry, social withdrawal, hyperactivity and obsessive behaviour, seek greater control or lesser responsibility over an area of their life, etc.

How do you respond?

The events and circumstances that result in pain for our friends often provoke deep anxieties in ourselves. How do you recognise your anxiety in the midst of a friend's pain? Why is it important to recognise your own anxiety?

Job's friends do well before they open their mouths! What does it mean to

- Show up?
- Sit down?
- Shut up?

Job's friends steadily lose sight of what they are there for. Defending a position, regardless of whether they are right or wrong, becomes more important than showing sympathy and kindness. Consider some of the ways in which our words can be uncaring:

- giving an explanation or theological justification for the pain, e.g. God wants you to learn xyz
- having an expectation of how this will or should resolve, e.g. you'll come back stronger
- minimising the pain, e.g. it's not that bad
- relativising the pain, e.g. it's not as bad as...
- optimising the pain, e.g. look at this good thing that's come out of it

What if, instead, the point of (earthly) comfort is to facilitate 'good grief', that is, an *honest* human relationship with God? Consider the ways you might affirm every honest word or action of your friend in pain.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

Pray for one another and the people on your heart.