

STUDIES IN JOB

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NOTE: For messages on suffering in Job, see the book ISSUES OF SUFFERING.

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- 1. THE COURTROOM OF HEAVEN Based on Job 1:6-12**

The FBI has some amazing ways of bringing criminals to justice. One of these ways is by means of the Petrographic Unit of their famed laboratory in Washington, D. C. This unit is devoted to the analysis and identification of different kinds of soil. They know what soil is from a South Dakota corn field, or a moss cranberry bog, or an Arizona desert. By analyzing the mud on a mans shoes,

or from the underside of his car fender, they can tell where he has been.

For example: In March of 1960 a car had been abandoned near the dump in Atlantic City, New Jersey. It had been set afire and burned out. The FBI took samples of the soil under the fender, and they sent it to this Petrographic Unit. The soil revealed that that car had come from Morrison, Colorado, where Adolf Coors III had been kidnapped and murdered less than five weeks before. This evidence put the FBI on the trail of Joseph Corbett Jr., owner of the car, who is now serving a life sentence. The mud under his fenders led to the discovery of the corruption in his heart. The FBI has developed some marvelous methods to get their man.

Satan, in the book of Job, is portrayed as a sort of FBI agent of the spirit world. He walks to and fro upon the earth like a spy seeking to detect some evidence to show that even the best of men are no good. It is not just the guilty he is after, but the innocent. Satan seems to have a compulsion to prove that all goodness is mere sham. He feels that righteousness is only a racket, and that men are pious only because it pays. God has a different view of man, however, and he proudly calls attention to his righteousness servant Job. Satan clearly despises Job whom God so admires. Satan is a pessimist about man in general, and Job in particular. He knows he could prove that Job is a pious hypocrite. He just needed the freedom to put him to the test. He is saying to God, "Just let me analyze the soil is he made of, and I can prove he is rotten to the core. By his own mouth he will reveal his guilt, for he will curse you."

We are comparing Satan with the FBI, but he is really more like the diabolical secret police, or Gestapo, who are determined to ensnare the innocent, and prove that the loyal are really enemies of the state. God thinks Job is an ideal man, loyal and loving and

committed to what is good. Satan is the great accuser who says it is all a hypocritical facade. God does not ignore this accusation, but takes it seriously, for Satan appears to be a servant of God. His duty is to investigate, and bring back reports to the court of heaven. God does not scold or rebuke, but gives him greater power to test his theory, and get more evidence. Satan is like a prosecuting attorney in the court of heaven.

Before we pursue this case, and the methods used by the prosecuting attorney to prove Job was a scoundrel, we need to do a little FBI work ourselves, and investigate this zealous accuser. A slang expression for confusion is appropriate here, as we ask: Who the devil is this Satan who marches into the presence of God with these charges against Job? We are forced by the book of Job to confess how ignorant we are about Satan, and his function in God's total plan. It is not wise to be ignorant about one whose job it is to know everything about you. The CIA of our nation has spies in the Intelligence agencies of other nations so we can know what they know about us. If you don't know what your enemy knows about you, he has an advantage over you. Paul said this of Satan in II Cor. 2:11. He said we are not ignorant of Satan's devices, or designs. The purpose was to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us. Paul is saying, what you don't know can hurt you.

Job did not know that Satan had accused him of serving God for the profit in it. He was at a tremendous disadvantage because of this lack of knowledge. We have this information, however, and we can see what Job never did. Satan's primary function is that of man's accuser. God is for man, and Satan is the opponent of man. The Jews have an ancient tradition that Scripture seems to support. They say that Satan fell because of his jealousy of man. This would explain why he tempted man to fall. God made him a marvelous being of glory, but he became envious when God made man in His own image, and began to devote so much love and attention to man,

as the crown of His creation.

Cain envied Able because God accepted Able's offering, and not his own. This led to murder. It is generally believed that Satan hated God first, and that was the motive to get man to oppose God and rebel. But, as the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia points out, there are more scriptures that suggest, "Satan's jealousy and hatred of man has led him into antagonism to God, and consequently to goodness." This fits the picture we have in Job, and most all of the Old Testament. Satan is a servant of God, but by the time we get to the New Testament, he is a total enemy of God, and the reason is clearly due to the opposition Satan took to man. God is determined to love and save man, but Satan is determined to destroy man.

The New Testament supports this view by showing Satan to be the chief opponent of the plan of salvation. He alone could hinder it, and in the book of Revelation, in 12:10 we read this description of Satan's being cast out of heaven. "I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God." Satan has always been man's great enemy, and Jesus is the only defense attorney who can help him escape the charges, for Satan is right when he accuses man, and man's only hope is pardon through the blood of Christ.

Satan was wrong in his accusation against Job. Had he just accused him of being a sinner, he would have been accurate. Satan was really out to get Job as a fraud, but Job was good and loyal to God that Satan could not tolerate it. Job was destroying Satan's whole plot to undermine God's faith in man. Satan had to prove that Job was a pious hypocrite, to prove all righteousness of men was a sham. At its very core, the book of Job reveals a battle over

the worst and dignity of man. Satan argues he is worthless, and not worth saving. God takes the position that men can be faithful, and pass any test they have to go through. Here were the two views of man, and Job was the one who would prove either Satan or God the wisest, and the best judge of the worth of mankind.

How Job responds to this test will determine if Satan's pessimism should govern the destiny of man, or God's optimism. As the Advocate and Accuser of mankind watch Job, it is a good thing he didn't know what was going on in heaven, for such a responsibility would frighten anyone into panic. This glimpse into the court of heaven is worth the focus of our attention for a few minutes.

Presidents call their cabinets together, and kings call their courts and nobles together for counsel. Leaders and authorities in all walks of life meet with others to hear reports and make decisions. This pattern, according to Scripture, is also followed in heaven. The implications are, God has multitudes of servants, active in all parts of His vast universe, which is beyond our comprehension. These servants come before God from time to time to report. All of the millions and billions of spiritual beings God has created are not idle, but are active, and Satan is but one of these servants, here in Job.

This strikes us as being very unusual, but this concept is referred to many times in the Old Testament. God is supreme ruler over a host of celestial beings who are sometimes called gods. When Satan is called the god of this world, it is easy to see how this planet was assigned to him, by God, in the counsel halls of heaven. Listen to some of these verses from the Psalms. Psalms. 86:8, "There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like thine." Psalms. 96:4, "For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised. He is to be revered above all gods." Psalms. 135:5, "For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods." These gods, so often referred to, are obviously the celestial members of God's heavenly

counsel. They are gods, or rulers, over various parts of God's creation. Satan being the god of this world. All of these gods are created beings who are servants of Jehovah.

We have to use our imagination, but just think of the great assemblies among men. The supreme court, the congress, the U. N., and imagine how much more impressive the gathering of those ambassadors of God, who have come back to the court of heaven from the far corners of the universe. God rules the universe through a great host of principalities and powers in heavenly places. We know very little about the vast complex government of God's total universe. Psa. 82:1 gives us just a glimpse. "God has taken His place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods He holds judgment." This is the real Supreme Court. Psa. 89:6-7 says, "For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about Him."

We tend to miss this Old Testament concept, and see God alone on the throne, or Jesus at His right hand, but we do not see the Parliament, or the Congress, that host of powers by which God governs His universe. I am grateful for the book of Job, for it compels us to consider the facts of God's heavenly government, and it helps us grasp some things that other wise are too obscure. One of these being the nature and role of Satan. Satan's existence, fall, and battle with man, all make sense when we see him as a ruler gone corrupt, because of pride and envy. Job had to suffer because of Satan's recommendation in the council of heaven, just as all men often suffer because of decisions made by government bodies.

It is clear that Job was not suffering to make him a better person. It was designed by Satan to prove he was never a good person in the first place. If God wanted to improve somebody by suffering, He would have chosen somebody other than Job. Job was

selected to suffer because he was the best man alive. He did not need to be purified by the fires of affliction. There is a lot of truth to the idea there is value in suffering, and the idea that people can be made better through it, but you have to ignore Scripture to think that is an adequate explanation of suffering. It is another half truth that becomes a whole lie where it doesn't fit. To say to someone who has lost a child that God allowed it to make them stronger, is to stand with Satan against man, rather than with God, and for man. All the ideas about suffering being of value have limited application. In Job's case they don't fit at all. Job was not a better man for his suffering. The only real bad thing he ever did, he did because of his suffering.

Another view of suffering is that it brings out the good in others. There is no doubt about the truth of this view. Disaster and great human suffering always produce heroic deeds, and noble responses. Most all humanitarian acts of love are in response to human suffering. Again, however, it is folly to think of this as the ultimate value of suffering. To kill 7,000 people in an earthquake, to produce heroic deeds, and give many people a chance to express compassion, it not good planning, if you mean to imply, God allows such tragedy for these weak reasons. It would be equivalent to your sticking your arm in the combine, so your son can learn emergency first aid. No one would be impressed with your wisdom.

This view of suffering does not fit the suffering of Job at all; not even superficially. His suffering brought out the worst in everybody. His friends were compelled by its severity to be severe in their false judgment that he was a terrible sinner. Job's wife was likely a sweet godly woman, but his suffering made her bitter, and she called upon Job to curse God and die. The only way you can get good out of all suffering is by the Procrustes method. You have to chop off what doesn't fit, and stretch everything else so it does. The honest mind can find no comfort in this kind of exercise. The flow of

lava enriches the soil, but do not think this will bring comfort to those who have just seen their families and villages wiped out by a volcano. Christians who latch on to one theory of suffering, and apply it to all situations, do great harm, just as did the friends of Job. When the theory does not fit, people are forced by the theory, if they really believe it, to think of God as unjust or uncaring.

Job the sufferer had to suffer even more because of the non-sufferers easy solution to his problem. So when you are trying to persuade the victims of a natural disaster that it produces unity and heroes of compassion, they will be lamenting your blindness to the looters and thieves. Easy answers are almost always false answers, when it comes to the realm of suffering. Job is a victim of a jealous enemy, who is Satan. Job is so good and godly, and such an ideal man, that God has blessed him in every way, and it makes Satan sick. Job never would have been the target of Satan's testing had he been more worldly and wicked. Satan is out to get Job just because he is so good. The facts are just the opposite of what the friends of Job spend hours arguing about. Job does not suffer because of sin, but because of the lack of it. He suffers because of his opposition to sin, and he proves you can suffer plenty by not sinning.

Satan is no amateur accuser. He knows that if you can bring the best man to a fall, you don't have to worry about lesser men. Satan goes right to the top. God is so proud of Job that he flaunts him before Satan, the first pessimist of the universe. Have you considered my servant Job God asks? That is, in all your snooping and spying out the defects in man, have you been able to get anything on Job? Satan is aggravated that his file on Job is as empty as his heart is of love. He insists that the reason is because Job has a, let's make a deal religion, and God is giving him such a good deal he can't afford to be a sinner. Satan says just stop the handouts, and you will see, Job, like a spoiled child will throw a tantrum, and curse you to your face.

Satan is no atheist. He not only believes in God, and that God is good, he believes God is too good to man. Satan does not attack God, but man. His goal is to prove to God that man is not a being worth saving, for he only loves God for purely selfish motives. If Satan can get man to curse God, and God to condemn and forsake man, his ambition will be fulfilled. Note how directly opposite this is to the role of Christ as the one mediator between God and man. His goal is to get man to love God, and God to pardon and save man. Satan, therefore, is the anti-Christ. If Satan could get his way, he would be a top leader in God's universe, and man would be scraped as a failed experiment.

Satan charges that what appears so good is really a cover up. Man's chief nature is selfish, and what's in it for me is all he cares about. Remove the fringe benefits and he will drop his faith without regret. If Satan is right, and he can prove it with Job, then God's whole plan for man is a flop. What value is goodness if it is only purchased behavior? If evil paid more, then the person would be evil. Man is not loyal is what Satan is arguing. He is good when it pays, but cut off the check, and he will side with evil. Satan's question is a key factor in this whole book. Does Job fear God for nothing? Would he be truly good if the wages were withdrawn? God looks at Job and says yes.

But if Satan is right, God can have no true relationship with man, for all religion is a fake loyalty for a price. God had to let Job be tested, for the value of the whole plan of salvation depended on Job proving Satan wrong. I wonder if God could have the faith in us that he had in Job? We need to examine our lives in the light of Satan's charge. Do we love God, serve Him, come to church, live righteously, all because it pays, or would we do all of this even if the blessing were taken away? Would you be one of those who lets tragedy cause you forsake the church, and God's people, or could you say with Job, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him." The

book of Job makes us ask the question, can God believe in me?

2. JOB'S WIFE Based on Job 2:1-13

Because of his great novel, War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy became one of the most famous Russians that ever lived. His fame and fortune did not bring him happiness, however, because of his wife. They were about as compatible as a porcupine and a bubble. She loved luxury, and he hated it. She loved the plaudits of society, and he sought to escape them. She just loved the use of wealth for power, and he felt it was a cursed sin. She was so filled with jealousy that she drove all his friends away from the home. She even drove out her own daughter, and then rushed into Tolstoy's room and shot the girls picture with an air-rifle.

For years she nagged, scolded, and screamed to get her own way, and when he resisted she would fall to the floor in a fit with a bottle of opium to her lips, swearing she would kill herself. Finally, at age 82, Tolstoy fled from his home into the cold not knowing where to go. Eleven days later he died of pneumonia in a railway station house.

I share this history, of a less than ideal wife, because most of the commentators of history feel that Job's wife was in this same category, or even worse. Way back in the early centuries of Christianity, preachers were saying, Job's biggest tragedy was that his wife was not visiting the kids when the tornado hit. Job lost everything but his wife, and leaving her was Satan's most cruel blow. Modern preachers say this same type of thing as a joke, but many of the great theologians have meant it in all seriousness. Augustine called her the devil's accomplice. Calvin called her a Diabolical Fury.

No woman in history has been so severely condemned for so few words. She only steps on the stage for a moment, and she utters about ten words. On the basis of those few words she has been psychoanalyzed by preachers and scholars, and they have concluded, she was to Job what Judas was to Jesus. She was just a terrible wife. Kuyper, the modern preacher and theologian, expresses the pessimism of the centuries about her. He writes, "In her the last spark of a woman's love, the last remainder of feminine devotion, has been completely extinguished." God made man just a little lower than the angels, but here was a woman who seems to be just a little higher than the beast.

You women will be glad to hear that there is another, far more merciful, view of this poor woman. William Blake, the English poet-painter, produced a book of paintings depicting the major scenes of the book of Job, back in 1825. He did not follow the lines of tradition, and write her off as one of Job's problems. He portrayed her at Job's side sharing in his suffering, in every scene. He vindicated her against the scorn of the centuries. This made many Bible expositors look more closely at the record of Scripture, rather than tradition, and their closer look changed tradition.

For centuries nobody ever stopped to consider that the ten children Job lost were also her children, and that as a mother, she would have a more severe struggle with grief, even than Job had. Plus, there is the fact that she now, on top of it all, has a husband who is helpless, and apparently fighting a hopeless battle against a dreaded disease. It is often more difficult to watch a loved one suffer than to suffer yourself. For centuries men looked upon Job's wife as an uninvolved bystander, who could have been a great encouragement to poor Job in his time of need, but she blew it. Nobody ever bothered to ask what she was going through. Everybody talks about the great suffering of Job, but few ever talk about the greater suffering of his wife.

Modern scholars, more sensitive to the grief she was trying to cope with, see the whole account in a different light. They no longer see her as a tool of Satan trying to get Job to turn on God. They see her as a woman in despair who cannot take anymore of the heartache of seeing her husband die a slow agonizing death. She, therefore, urges him to end it quickly by cursing God. It was a common belief that sudden death would result from cursing God. She was saying that he should commit suicide. Her motive was mercy, for she was advocating mercy killing.

Job clearly rebukes her for her desperate advice, and tells her it is folly to be angry at God. You have to take the bad with the good, and that is just life. "You buy the land, you get the stone. You buy the meat, you get the bone." Job has a spirit that handles crisis in a calm philosophical manner, and he stifles his wife's more emotional reaction to grief. What we have here, in this couple, is a very common experience. Two people coping with tragedy with two different perspectives, both of which represent millions of personalities.

When we get the record straight, we discover that Mrs. Job's reaction is just as common, and just as normal as that of Job. All this business about her being the devils accomplice is nothing but slander against a Godly woman. God nowhere condemns her. He had a good chance at the end when he condemns Job's friends, but God obviously did not see her as a vicious foe. Instead, she becomes the wife and mother of the ideal family again, and they live happily ever after in God's blessing. I prefer to see Job's wife in the light of God's treatment of her, and Job's love for her, rather than in the light of histories condemnation of her.

If we learn nothing else from the study of Job's wife, let us learn this: Do not ask only, what do great men say, or what does tradition say, but ask, what does the Bible say. Check your convictions

against the Word of God. If they don't fit the facts of Scripture, you should be glad to change your convictions. Once you know what Scripture says, then it is of value to search history and tradition for support. The contemporary poet, Thomas John Carlisle, in his book Journey With Job, has this excellent sympathetic description.

**Job's wife is often caricatured
as a second Satan since she said
"Curse God and die" though few would like
to have their own biography encapsuled
in one phrase in or out of context.
At least she didn't prostitute theology
and make believe to dust her husband's ash pit.**

**Perhaps she had to take a job
to shield herself from the poor house and provide
for doctors bills-if one would come-
and to take her mind off what the patient looked like
and all that had happened to her as well as him.
Job did not cry which doesn't mean she didn't.
It's hard to have a hero for a husband.**

Lest you think the modern poet is too sympathetic with her, let me share with you the fact that the merciful and optimistic view of her goes back before any preacher ever condemned her. The Septuagint is the Hebrew Bible which was translated into Greek 200 years before Christ. This was the Bible of New Testament Christians. In that Bible this paragraph was added to the story of Job to give more details. The 70 scholars who translated that Bible apparently felt that no woman could say only ten words and be done with it. So they added this expansion which, though it was not Scripture, does give us a commentary on how they saw Job's wife. They saw her as an exhausted grief stricken woman who had come to the end of her rope. That addition reads like this:

After a long time had passed his wife said to him, "How long will you exercise patience, saying See, I will persevere a little longer, waiting and hoping for my redemption? For consider, the memory of you has vanished from the earth, your sons and your daughters are no more, those who were the pains and the travail of my womb, and for whom I exhausted myself in vain. As for you, there you sit, your body rotting amid worms, and spending the nights in the open air. While I, wondering about a slave, roaming restlessly hither and thither, from house to house, await the hour of a sunset that I may rest from my weariness and from the sorrows which now press upon me. Now say some word against the Lord, and die.

Job's wife carried even a greater burden than he, and so her grief reaction is more understandable. The apocryphal Job says she made the supreme sacrifice and sold her hair to buy bread. The Koran does accuse her of being tempted by Satan to have all her former luxury restored if she worshipped him. She told Job, and he swore to give her one hundred lashes if he recovered. The Koran, however, ends the story with mercy for her. Job was aloud to keep his oath by striking her with one blow of a palm branch with one hundred leaves. G. Campbell Morgan, that prince of expositors, sums up the positive perspective on this suffering woman. "Don't let us criticize her until we have been where she was." He says, she just felt she would rather see him dead than to suffer so.

All of this was to set the stage for a study of grief. There are two basic responses to tragic suffering: Resignation and rebellion. Job took the route of resignation, which is clearly the best way to go, but his wife took the way of rebellion, which is so much harder. So many people have to take this more difficult route, because they are just not made like Job. They need to be angry in their grief, and get their negative emotions expressed before they can adjust, and accept their suffering. If they try to suppress their rebellion and anger, and

pretend they are resigned to their fate, as the will of God, they risk a lifetime of bitter resentment. Honest rebellion is far more healthy than hypocritical resignation.

Job's wife was no hypocrite. She was angry at life, and angry at God, and angry at her husband for his excruciating patience. Maybe he did not mind dying by inches, but she could not tolerate it, and she cried out, "For heaven's sake get it over with. If God won't make you well, then get on with the inevitable-cruse God and die." The Speaker's Bible says, "The sorrow of Job's wife has never been dealt with-perhaps never will be; certainly never by a man." I know what the author means. A man can never know what a mother of ten children feels like when she is suddenly, and tragically, left childless. But certainly men are not so hard and insensitive that they cannot come to some intelligent grasp of her grief.

Edgar N. Jackson, the outstanding authority on grief, in his books Understanding Grief and The Many Faces of Grief, says the goal of the counselor and comforter is not to say, "I know how you feel." That is superficial, and can never be fully accurate. What is important is not to feel what they feel, but to let them feel what they feel. You must give others the full right to feel their real feelings, and share them, rather than try to make them feel in ways that conform to what is acceptable to others. In other words, do not try to make them feel like you feel they ought to feel.

Poor Mrs. Job would have ended up in an asylum had she gone to most of the preachers of history for counseling. Most of them could not have tolerated her feelings of rebellion. The fact is, however, that her feelings were normal, and common even among Christians, when they faced tragedy. To accuse her of being Satan's assistant is as cruel a thing to do as something dreamed up by Satan's assistant. The record shows that Job also became very angry and rebellious as his suffering continued. Even this near

perfect man, with nearly infinite patience, could not escape the rebellious emotions. He charges God with hunting him like a lion, and comes very close to doing what his wife asked him to do. In chapter 9:22-23 he says, "He destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent." If cursing God would have led to sudden death, Job came exceedingly close here, and elsewhere. The point I am seeking to establish is, it is not just the emotional female, but also the rational male that goes through the rebellious stage of grief.

It is very important to know this so that, if and when it happens to you, you can be aware that it is normal, and that God will not condemn you for your rebellious anger. Why not? Because the fact is, tragic death is not His will, but is suffering that comes from the enemy. It is evil, and we have every right to be angry about it. Jesus in His humility was angry as He saw the sorrow that the death of Lazarus to Mary and Martha. He was angry at the injustice of the money changers in the temple. What is not right should make us angry, and tragedy is not right. The death of any loved one is a robbery by our enemy, and anger is perfectly normal. Our problem is, we tend to get angry at God, for we feel He could have, and should have, prevented that robbery. Grief leads people to become angry at pastors for not being more effective with God in prayer for healing their loved ones. They get angry at doctors, funeral directors, and anyone else who seems to benefit by the work of the enemy.

Resignation is so much easier on everybody, but the facts of life indicate that rebellion is more common, and we need to be prepared to expect it in our own hearts, or we will give Satan an advantage over us in grief. Sometimes the finest Christians are shocked at how they handle grief. C. S. Lewis has become one of the best known Christians of the 20th century. His books are read around the world. He has become a pillar of the faith. Before Lewis died, he

had to watch his loving wife die. He loved her dearly, and was very angry that disease and death should rob him of his treasure. This great man of God would not hurl rocks at Mrs. Job, but would have held her hand and said, "I understand."

He tells the whole story of his own rebellion in his book, *A Grief Observed*. He writes, "It is hard to have patience who people who say there is no death or death does not matter. There is death, and whatever is matters. And whatever happens has consequences, and they are irrevocable and irreversible." His own grief made him realize how easy it is to be like one of Job's friends. It is so easy to bear other people's sorrows, and give advise, but it is all so superficial, and we really do not grasp what grief is all about until we have to endure it ourselves. He wrote, "If my house has collapsed at one blow, that is because it was a house of cards. The faith which took these things into account was not faith, but imagination. The taking them into account was not real sympathy. If I had really cared, as I thought I did, about the sorrows of the world, I should not have been so overwhelmed when my own sorrow came."

C.S. Lewis is confirming G. Campbell Morgan's conviction that we ought not to condemn Job's wife for her rebellion until we have been where she was. Let me assure you, most Christians with a deep faith, and a clear hope of heaven, would still go through rebellion on their way to resignation. One of the best examples of this I have ever read is Iona Henry's book, *Triumph Over Tragedy*. Mom and dad sat in the hospital praying for their 14 year old daughter Jane. She had a brain tumor and was having surgery. The father was already in the rebellious stage, and was fighting a private war with God. "Jane, I told God, was only 14-too young to die with a tumor on the brain. I begged God for mercy and I argued: I even threatened Him-anything to save Jane."

Jane died, and they had to go home and tell their ten year old son. He ran into the library and began to kick the furniture. They decided to go on a trip after the funeral. They went to his father's place, who was a preacher. On the way they were hit by a train, and the father and son were killed instantly. The mother was as good as dead with many severe injuries. She spent a third of year in the hospital in a strange town. Her book is the story of her journey through rebellion to restful resignation in Christ.

She struggled so deeply with the issue of suffering, and I will sharing her insights as we study Job. For now, we want to learn from her rebellion. After her long recovery and return to a life empty of all the people she loved, she writes, "I wandered the streets, forlorn, lost, ready to scream my bitterness. I looked at women with husbands and laughing children, and I hated them." Many a times she thought of suicide. She had to cling to a post in the subway to keep from throwing herself on the tracks. Joni, another great Christian sufferer, also said she would have gladly committed suicide in her rebellious stage had she been able to figure out a way to do it. Her paralysis is the only thing that saved her.

What helped Iona come through her rebellion to a state of peaceful resignation in Christ was not easy answers, or condemnation of her rebellion, but acceptance of her rebellion. Those who helped her most were those who recognized that it is a very dark world in which Christ is the light, and a Christian does not need to pretend it is otherwise. We only add to people's grief when we fail to see their need to feel angry at life's evils. God has a much better psychology. He allows people to even get angry at Him, in order to rid him of their hostility. The Psalms are full of this kind of release for grief emotions. The more you understand grief, the more you will sympathize with Job's wife, and not condemn her. Christians have failed so often to be comforters in life's trials. Let us learn from the study of grief that Job's wife had a normal response

to her suffering, and that we need to accept this kind of response in other Christians who suffer tragedy.

3. THE SAINT IN DEPRESSION Based on Job 3

I read a humorous story that fits the experience of Job. A man was on his roof trying to fix the TV antenna. Suddenly it began to rain, and while struggling with the guy wires he slipped. As he tumbled down the roof, he made a last ditch effort to grab the drain trough. There he was, hanging from the edge, three stories up, and in seconds his fingers began to tire. Desperately he struggled to hold on, but his strength was nearly gone. Not knowing where to turn, he looked up into the sky and asked, "Is there anyone up there who can help me?" Sure enough, a cloud parted, and a voice came from behind the cloud, "Believe and let go." The man starred blankly into the sky for about 20 seconds, and then shouted, "Is there anyone else up there who can help me?"

It is easy to understand why the man wanted a second opinion. We always desire a second opinion when the first opinion is not what we want to hear. If we do not like God's first response to our prayer, we seek for a second response more favorable to our desires. We are lovers of the second chance, and of the truth that, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. This is one of life's most joyous positive facts. Thank God for the second chance. But there is another side to this truth illustrated by our story. Life also gives us a second chance to blow it. Doubt gets a second chance to overwhelm faith, and cause you to question God's answer. You may succeed today, but Satan will give you a second chance to fail tomorrow. You may stand fast in the storm of affliction today, but Satan was not discouraged, for he will give you another chance to sink later on. Peter stood on water, but Satan gave him a second chance and he sunk.

It is important that we see both sides of this picture. Just as we never give up hope for the sinner, because as long as he is alive, there is a chance he will repent, and open his heart to Christ, and become a forgiven child of God. Satan never gives up on the righteous saint either, for as long as he is alive, there is always the chance that he will fall through temptation, or crack under pressure and curse God. Just as no defeat in this life is final, so no victory is the end of the battle, for in the next round Satan can lead us back into defeat.

Job illustrates this truth so dramatically in chapter 3. Chapter one draws to a close with Job saying, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Chapter two has Job rebuking his wife for her pessimism, and saying, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" Both these first two chapters emphasize that Job did not sin with his lips. There is just no doubt about it, Job won round one and two easy. Satan got a lot of punches in, but Job never even said ouch. Now we come to chapter three, and all the judges agree, this one goes to Satan. Satan does not win the fight, for he said Job would curse God, and it is to Job's eternal credit that he never did that. He did, however, do some cursing, and that gave Satan this round.

Job so cursed the day of his birth, and his very existence, with such hostility, it is understandable why this chapter is the first one with no praise of Job. It does not say, he did not sin with his lips. Satan gave Job a second chance to express his grief with rebellion, and Job did it. Thank God! Yes, thank God, Job broke loose with this bitter curse of his life. Without this crack in his armor, he would be of little value for us to study. If Job was like a machine that could take all the suffering he endured, and just keep smiling, and saying that God is in heaven, and all is right with the world, the book would have no message for us.

You might just as well study the rock of Gibraltar for insights into life's meaning. If Job had never become depressed and hostile in suffering, he would have nothing in common with the rest of mankind. If Job never had to battle rebellion, we could not identify with him anymore than we could with a bowling pin. It takes a lot of punishment, but just keeps standing in there without complaint. If you can find comfort in that fact, then you could enjoy Job without chapter three. Most people need chapter three to make the story of Job realistic and relevant. Chapter three shows us Job the man. The man like us, with feelings and emotions. The emotion that stands out here is one we want to focus on. It is the emotion of depression. There are three things about depression that we want to consider.

First:

I. DEPRESSION IS NASTY.

It is nasty in the sense that it is very disagreeable and objectionable, like nasty weather. It is nasty in the sense that it is harmful and dangerous, like a nasty fall. Depression is of the kingdom of darkness, and not of the kingdom of light, for it robs the soul of the fruits of the spirit. Faith, hope, love, the great virtues all begin to wither in the darkness of depression. That is why it is so superficial to say that suffering purifies the soul. This is an aspect of the truth that can be illustrated from life, but to try and apply it in all situations is to be blind to the facts of life. If suffering made everybody stronger, we would live in a world of heroes, but the fact is suffering makes most people worse and weaker.

Job's soul is not being ennobled by his suffering. Here is a man who is crying out, "I wish I was dead." His ideal would be to never have been born, and his second choice was to have died at birth or shortly after. Death would have been sweet relief to him. "If only the night had never been when I was conceived. If only the day of

my birth had never dawned, I would be so relieved." If a great man of God could feel this way in depression, it makes sense why depression is a major cause of suicide. 35 to 40,000 people a year, in the United States alone, take their own lives because of depression. This represents over half of the suicides. Many feel that depression is the cause of more human suffering than any other disease in the world.

The story is told, and angel of the Lord informed Satan that God was going to take away all of his weapons but one. "Which one is that," he asked? When the angel replied, "Depression," Satan laughed and said, "Good, in that one I have them all." Depression is a nasty weapon. Look what it has done to Job. It has made him his own worse enemy. This is one of clues to determine if you are heading for depression. Satan uses depression to get you on his side against yourself. If you begin to lose your sense of self-esteem, and get down on yourself, you are coming under Satan's influence. Depression is a tool Satan uses to distort reality in the human mind. In extreme cases wealthy men will moan because they cannot provide food for their children. Beautiful women will beg for plastic surgery in the belief that they are ugly. Brilliant men will berate themselves for being stupid. Depression makes people see only the worst about themselves, and long for escape from life, and themselves.

If you find yourself complaining, griping, and being pessimistic about everything, that should be a clue that you are fighting depression. Job was always such an optimist about life, but now we see the storm begins to drag his anchor, and the lines that held him fast to heaven are straining. He is becoming a pessimist like the author of Ecclesiastes who writes in 4:2-3, "I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive; but better than both is he who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the son." The bliss of death, or non-

existence, looks so good to those who reach the bottom of depression. This is despair, and that is where we find Job in chapter three, on the bottom. You have to admit it is a nasty emotion that can do that to such a saint. The second thing we want to see is-

II. DEPRESSION IS NORMAL.

It's nasty, but it's normal. That is, you don't have to be ashamed that you get depressed. It is a natural response to life's negatives, and both God and man expect it. By being normal, I do not mean it is good, or all right. It is normal to burn your hand if you pick up the hot end of a stick, but that is not to say, it is okay to pick up burning sticks at the wrong end. Just because something is normal, does not make it good. It is just that something that is normal eliminates shock or surprise. Nobody is surprised that a red hot stick burns your hand when you pick it up. It is no shock that a man of God blisters from such an act. So, also, it should be no surprise that God's people get depressed. It is normal for Christians to get athletes foot, tooth aches, and gray hair. It is also normal for them to get depressed.

Had Job not gotten depressed in his suffering, he would have been abnormal. Anyone who goes through life and never experiences depression, is abnormal. It would be wonderful to be abnormal, and escape all depression, but the fact is, most Christians are normal, and at some point they struggle with depression. Tim La Haye surveyed over 100,000 Christians, and never found one who could say they had never been depressed. Your chances of getting through life without depression are about as slim as your chance of keeping a pound of jello nailed to a tree. But don't feel bad, for depression is a sign of normalcy.

Dr. W. L. Northridge in his book, *Disorders Of The Emotional And Spiritual Life* says, it is healthy to have a mixed temperament

that can experience the negative side of life as well as the positive side. He writes, "Those who never feel depressed are rather superficial, if not psychotic." He is saying, if you never feel depressed, you may be sick, and not able to deal with reality as it is. You are not prepared to weep with those who weep, because you cannot grasp the reality of the sadness that leads to weeping.

Job's friends could not accept his depression as normal. The result is, they could not be true comforters. Many times we fail to be Christlike in relating to the depressed, because we cannot accept their depression as normal. We try to hide it or escape from it, rather than accept it as part of life's real battle. Joni illustrates this in her book, *A Step Further*. She tells of Jeanette and her husband who lost three year old Bradley to cancer. He was a cute little blonde blue-eyed boy they loved as deeply, and fought for so earnestly for one and a half years. Two weeks after the funeral she went to a women's Bible study. A little boy about Bradley's age was on his tiptoes trying to get a drink at the fountain. When she saw the darling, she began to sob. A woman she did not know saw her, and patted her shoulder saying, "I am praying for you honey, praise the Lord." This sounds like a nice gesture to us, but for Jeanette the words stung like fire.

Jeanette later told of how she felt. "I really had to ask God to help me with my feelings about that woman. I know she only wanted to help. But the way she said praise the Lord made me feel like I didn't have any right to cry if I was trusting the Lord. Maybe she didn't know that trusting the Lord doesn't rule out crying. Maybe she forgot that God told us to weep with those who weep." Here was a woman who was hurt, because she was made to feel she had no right to be depressed as a child of God. We often do this in trying to help fellow believers out of depression, but we would help more by recognizing the right to be depressed.

Dr. Tim La Haye, one of the outstanding pastors of our day, tells of his being deeply depressed. It was because a project he had worked on for years, to build a new church, was voted down by the San Diego City Council. A dear missionary friend heard the bad news, and came to cheer him up. With a big smile on his face, he slapped him on the shoulder and said, Praise the Lord ! Tim writes, "My reaction was one of intense anger. I not only resented his lack of sensitivity and understanding, but even his cheerful grin." You only add to people's problems when you think a cheery Praise the Lord settles it all. Prov. 25:20 says, "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather.....So is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart." We are to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice, but not rejoice with those who weep, for this says they do not have a right to be sad.

As we have said, it is normal to be depressed, and one should not be judged as a failure to be what God wants them to be, when they are depressed. God expects Christians to get burned when they touch fire, and He expects them to suffer depression when they are touched by grief and serious suffering. This does not mean it is good, it simply means it is normal. It is nasty but normal emotion. But the best thing about depression that we want to consider is-

III. DEPRESSION IS NEGATEABLE.

You can nullify the effects of depression, and deprive it of its very existence. It can be neutralized and abolished, with no permanent victory for evil. As down as Job was, and as deeply as he sank into despair, he did not give depression a permanent victory. Satan won this round with his powerful punch of depression, but Job still went on to take the fight. How did he do it? By something he did, and by something he didn't do. Here are two keys to getting out of the dungeon of depression. The first thing he did to negate depression was-

1. He expressed his feelings. Chapter 3 is an excellent example of spiritual vomiting. He was getting all the bitter poison in his soul out of his system. If you really want to help people in the depths of depression, induce vomiting. That is, help them to verbally pour out their feelings, and express their sorrow and despair over their loss, whatever it might be.

It is not easy or enjoyable to clean up a mess that the stomach could not handle. Nor is it easy to hear the verbal pessimism of a depressed soul, but someone has got to do it to be a true comforter. Most of us would have cut Job off after his first sentence when he said, "Let the day perish wherein I was born." We would have prevented him from ventilating his feelings. It would not be for his good, but because we could not stand to hear such things. We don't want people to vomit because we don't want to see it, and we don't want people to let out their poisonous feelings of their depressed mind, because we don't want to hear it. But the true comforter says, "Let it out, and if it hurts me to hear such awful things, then I will suffer with you, and weep with you."

Joni said something that should open our eyes to understand Job, and all who suffer depression. She writes, "At first it may seem that a person who has just lost a leg, discovered he has terminal cancer, or broken his neck, is desperately looking for answers. Why did this happen to me? He cries, and so we jump right in and give him 16 Biblical reasons why it happened. But more often than not, when he first asks "Why?" He doesn't really mean it as a question. He means it as an emotional release---sometimes even as an accusation. It's not the genuine "Why?" of a searching heart, but the bitter "Why?" of a clenched fist.

It takes time for a person to realize that he will never walk again, or that he really does have terminal cancer, or whatever. After he has had time to cry, to agonize, and to sort out his feelings, then he

gets into an "Asking mood," and then our advice and counsel is helpful."

Job was being wise and normal in getting his feelings expressed. We need to be wise in recognizing it is good to do so, and, therefore, listen to those who cry out, and have sympathy, and not try to cut them off. Job expressed his worse feelings, and that was healthy. The second thing is what he didn't do.

2. He didn't act on his feelings. Feelings are not evil, no matter how negative they are. Feelings are neutral. Good feelings are not a virtue if they do not lead to good actions. Bad feelings are not evil if they do not lead to evil actions. Feelings are the potential for good or evil, but in themselves they are neither. It is what the will does with feelings that is good or evil. If you do not chose to act on negative depressed feelings, they will be negated, and time will erase them. There is a time for action, and a time for inaction. The time for inaction is when you are pessimistic and depressed.

The rule of life that most counselors recognize is, never make any major decision in a depressed mood. Don't pay any attention to yourself when you are down on yourself. Don't decide to quit anything, or give something. Just refuse to do anything based on your depression, for actions will lead you to do what is wrong, and that is how depression wins the battle. It gets you to do what is foolish. Feelings can change, and as long as you just feel, you have not lost, but once you act on your feelings, and quit your job, jump off the bridge, or hit someone, evil has won the battle. Job felt like committing suicide, but he did not act on his feelings, and so he gained the victory over depression.

Jesus did these same two things on the cross. He expressed His deep feelings when He said, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" Yet, He did not act on His deep feelings, and come

down from the cross, forsaking His commitment to be our Savior. Jesus endured the worst than Satan could throw at Him, and like Job, He conquered, but Jesus is more than our example, He is the source of our victory. As we remember what He did for us on the cross, let us thank Him and ask Him to give us victory over that great enemy of the soul-depression.

4. DOWN IN THE DUMPS based on Job 3

A midwestern pastor was cleaning out his garage. He was planning to haul the rubbish to the dump. His two sons were excited about this, because they considered the dump the happy hunting ground. Only those who have ever found an exciting piece of junk there can fully appreciate their feelings. Unfortunately, the father got a call that demanded that he go to the hospital. He told the boys he would have to haul the rubbish away another day. One of the boys kicked the ground, and in disgust said, "I'll never be a minister. You don't even have time to go to the dumps."

It would be a blessing if it was true, that pastors and leaders of the church did not ever have to get down in the dumps of depression. The facts of history indicate, however, that depression is no respecter of persons. You do not escape it by being in the ministry, or by any other profession, however noble. The best of men and women, and the wisest, and most gifted, and most used of God, find themselves going to the dumps. If Job could stay on his ash pile all through history, he could visit with the great of every age, for sooner or later they all sit where he sat-in the dump of depression.

Martin Luther was typical of the great men of God who found

themselves in the dumps. Chapter 3 of Job could well have been one of his own songs of the blues. He sounded so much like Job when he wrote, "I am sick of life, if this life can be called life. Implacable hatred and strife amongst the great-no hopes of any improvement-the age is Satan's own; gladly would I see myself and all my people quickly snatched from it." He could not see the future and how his writing would influence millions all over the world.

Many saints have gone through what is called, the dark night of the soul, where they feel God has left them. Saints do not go to hell, but hell comes to them. Depression can be so severe that it is a minor hell-a taste of what it is to be God-forsaken. Some depression is good, for it keeps us in touch with reality, which is full of evil and sorrow. It is sometimes easy to forget this, and go our own selfish way if depression does not bring us down where we feel what is real. Tim LaHaye has written some of the finest books, and one is, *How To Win Over Depression*. He wrote this book because back in 1969 it hit him, and for two and a half years he went through five periods of depression. The awfulness of it motivated him to seek answers, and to help others to gain victory. Vance Havner went through great depression when his wife died, and he wrote, *Though I Walk Through The Valley*, to help others who go that same way.

Having great gifts, or excellent character, does not spare you from depression. Sir Winston Churchill had serious bouts with depression. Edgar Allen Poe would fall into a pit of depression after creating a master piece, and Van Gogh cut off his ear in a fit of despair. A list of the most famous and most talented people in the world would also be a list of people who have fought depression. It is a part of life, and is due to the fact that nobody's life is all it was meant to be. Men cannot help struggling with the meaning of life, and the purpose of so much that is evil, and this leads to depression.

Many people read Job and get relief from their depression, but

others read it and get more depressed. They see Job suffering as meaningful, for there is a goal, but their own suffering does not seem to have any meaning. It is always easy to think the other guy does not have it as bad as you. The fact is, just because we know Job's suffering had a meaning, he did not know, and had no clue as to what was going on. It was totally meaningless to him. He would not have been able to come out of his depression by mere positive thinking. He needed that, and after his pessimism was expressed, he still had some optimism. But Job expressed severe depression where he felt hopeless.

One of the symptoms of despair is that death looks good. Death is an enemy to those who love life, but those in deep depression look upon death as sweet release from life's misery. Job praises death in verse 13, as the place of quiet rest. He longs for death, and feels it is unfair to have to go on living, when death is so inviting. Such a love for, and longing for death, is not the normal attitude of a healthy man. It is a sign of deep depression. The depressed are pessimistic about life, and optimist about death. A Christian who spends too much time longing for heaven, is probably depressed about life on earth. This poem was found, as an ancient Near Eastern text, and it reveals just how appealing death can become when one is fed up with life.

Death is in my sight today,
Like the recovery of a sick man,
Like going out into the open after a confinement.
Death is in my sight today,
Like the odor of myrrh,
Like sitting under an awning on a breezy day.

Job sees death as a place where the weary are at rest, and everybody is equal, and there is no more oppression. It looks so good to him, he is sad he has to stay in the land of the living. Verse

21 is the climax of his death wish, for he longs for death, and desires it like a man digging for treasure. This might sound like a wonderful view of death, but it is not. It is a sick view, for all Job wants is escape. Death is just a way out of life's trials. It is no virtue to be ready to die gracefully if God wants you to live and fight. Paul did not know which way to go. He did not know if he should die and be with God, or stay and serve his Lord. But he did not long for escape. He loved life, and only thought of death as a door to Christ's presence. Paul was not depressed, but had a healthy view of life and death. Paul wanted more of life, but Job wanted out of life.

Job's view is that of a pessimist. We know he had good reason, but still it is not a view of life and death that is healthy for the believer. It is like the Greek pessimist. Sophocles, the ancient Greek, sounds just like Job.

**Not to be born is the most
to be desired, but having seen the light
the next best is to go whence one came
as soon as may be.**

This is pagan thinking, and when a believer gets depressed, he tends to develop pagan thinking. That is why it is always wise to reject your thoughts, and your feelings, when you are depressed.

True men of God often develop negative theology because they are depressed. They lead others to think that way, as if it was Biblical thinking, but in reality it is pagan thinking from the pit of depression. Lets look at some of the major causes for depression, for knowing these can help us understand ourselves, and understanding ourselves, is the key to coping with depression. One of the primary causes is-

1. DISAPPOINTMENT.

This is where it all begins. We have so many dreams and hopes in life that never go as we plan. You don't get depressed when everything goes your way, but since so often things go the opposite of what you planned, you get depressed. The more you are disappointed, the more likely you are to get depressed. If you favorite plant dies; your cat scratches the leg of your dining room table, and your son comes home with two F's on his report card, all in the same day, you may find yourself heading for the dumps. That is too much disappointment to handle cheerfully. Think of what Job's mind was handling. He had all his dreams of the future shattered in one day. No human being alive can take that kind of disappointment and escape depression.

Tim La Haye, in his book on depression, puts his finger on a major source that helps us better understand Job. He tells of how people who seldom express depression have terrible spells when they face divorce. He quotes one man as saying, "It took me almost a year to get over it! I had never been depressed in my life until my wife left me. Suddenly the carpet was jerked out from under my whole life. For weeks I just wanted to die." This is a common reaction, and La Haye says, "The root problem with those caught in despair is almost always the rejection of the person they love most." Disappointment in those we most love is the quickest way to the dumps.

If we apply this to Job, it does fit. Back in chapter 2 Job rebuked his wife for her pessimism. She was being weak, and he was being strong. That very rebuke of the one person left in his life, his primary source of love, could have added greatly to his own depression. Job had every reason there is to be depressed, and to be badly depressed. We will never have as good a reason as Job had, but any disappointment is sufficient to produce some degree of depression.

What can we do to off set it? We can expect to be disappointed. It is not so hard to take, if we plan for it. If you have a goal to achieve, and circumstances, or people, fail you, be prepared with a second goal, or back-up plan. Expect that you may be disappointed, and be ready to adjust. If you are not flexible, and instead, expect every plan to go your way, you are planning to be depressed. Instead, plan to escape the effects of disappointment by being ready with an alternative. This is superficial counsel to those in grief like Job, but it fits so many of life's disappointments, and even covers tragedy if you think about it. If death takes a loved one; if your house is destroyed; if you are forced to change your profession; if war should come to our country; all of these possibilities need us to be prepared. It is wise to give thought to how you would handle such things, for being prepared to adjust to disappointments, however tragic or trivial, is the key to winning over depression. Secondly, consider-

2. LACK OF SELF-ESTEEM.

If you cut yourself down, and think you are unworthy of being loved, you will struggle with depression. It is not what others think, but what you think of yourself, that really matters. Job sees himself as a misfit. He feels it would be better had he never been born. Abortion would have been a blessing he thinks. His self-image is poor, and he is depressed.

When his friends begin to accuse him of being a sinner, Job snaps out of his depression, for he has a good self-image, and he defends his righteousness. Your self-image can be both the cause and the cure of your depression. Job went into the dumps because his self-image began to fade, but he was lifted out of the dumps when his self-image was attacked, and he had a high enough view of himself to come to his own defense.

A Christian needs to develop a healthy self-image as a child of God, so that no matter what happens, and how badly he fails, or how much disappointment he faces, he can say, "Life is still worth living, for I care, and I can be used to be part of God's answer in this needy world. This is the key factor in helping yourself get out of the dumps."

5. SINFUL SYMPATHY Based on Job 4

Tragedy so often leads to bitterness against God. Mark Twain had a daughter who died at the age of 21 because of diphtheria. His wife also died young. He became so angry and bitter that he lashed out at God with the very gift that made him famous, his pen. He wrote an imaginative tale about Noah's Ark. Three days out of port in the flood Noah discovered he had left behind the tsetse fly, and had to go back. Mark Twain comments on how thoughtful God was to make Noah go back for this creature, so that men could be afflicted with its dreaded disease for all these centuries. The story was such a bitter and sarcastic slam at God that his relatives would not allow it to be published until 50 years after his death.

Job was not so direct in his bitterness over tragedy. He avoids an attack upon God, but he curses his birth and his life, and complains that God allows life to go on in such misery. It was shocking to Job's friends to hear him expressing such bitter emotions. The way he was handling his emotions was not pleasing to them, and they could no longer sit in silence and let his outcry against God go unchallenged.

Chapter 4 is the beginning of the speeches of Job's three friends, and his responses. Eliphaz is the first to speak, because he is the oldest, and has seniority. The three speak in the order of their age. The speeches get more and more radical, as they go from mild rebuke to vicious attack, because Job refuses to respond to their

advice as they expect him to do. These three men were true friends of Job, and not enemies. They traveled far, and stayed long, to comfort Job in his misery. We have to commend them for their effort. The reason they failed is because they were ignorant, and not because they were evil. They were just like all of us tend to be, inadequate of our understanding of how to help the grief stricken suffer.

As we commend their heartless attacks on Job, let us keep in mind, they represent us, the majority of well-meaning people who make life's burdens heavier, because we do not understand sympathy. We will learn little from the study of Job's friends, unless we see ourselves in them. The most caring and compassionate of us make some of the same blunders they did. The closer we are to the sufferer, the more likely we are to be as foolish as they were. We need to learn from their mistakes how to be true comforters. This means we must learn what sympathy is all about. For the basic need for all who suffer is sympathy. This is a neglected virtue in the Christian life, because we think of it as a sort of weak second rate virtue, unworthy of major attention.

This is a tragic attitude, and it leads Christians to be no better prepared than Job's friends to meet the deepest need of the sufferer. We handicap ourselves by failing to develop the capacity for sympathy. There is no way to become truly Christlike without this virtue. Jesus became a man to make sure He had the powers of true sympathy, and that is a primary basis for our comfort. Heb. 4:15 says, "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning." The sympathy of Jesus is the key to His ministry of His intercession on our behalf, and the key to our security. We know that even if nobody else understands us, Jesus does. That is what sympathy is all about. It is the ability to feel what another feels, and to be able to understand why they feel the

way they do.

Sympathy is one of the key ingredients to being a blessing. Listen to Peter as he makes it one of the links in the chain of successful Christian living. He writes in I Peter 3:8-9, "Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing." Peter would agree with Edmund Berke who said, "Next to love, sympathy is the divinest passion of the human heart." This is what Job's friends lacked, and what all of us lack so often, to be the blessing Peter says we are called to be. Job's friends did just what Peter said to avoid. They responded to Job's negative emotions with their own negative emotions, instead of sympathetic understanding.

Chapter 4 shows us three approaches that Eliphaz took to Job, which he apparently thought would be helpful, but which are contrary to the true spirit of sympathy, and thus, must be classified as sinful sympathy, for they do more harm than good. The first thing we see is-

I. HIS ACCUSATION.

Eliphaz starts off by saying he hopes Job will not be offended, but he just has to respond to Job's negative emotions. When you have to apologize for what you are about to say, you can count on it, you are not on the right track, for like Eliphaz, you are more concerned about getting something off your own chest than about lifting the burden of another. Eliphaz had to get out what was on his mind, at the expense of Job.

In verses 3-5 he says, you are always such a good counselor to others in their trials, but now when you suffer, you go all to pieces.

He is saying to Job, why don't you take your own medicine. He accuses Job of not being able to practice what he has preached to others. You have helped others be submissive in suffering, and now, you become a rebel in your own. You tell others to seek the silver lining in every cloud, but you seek only the escape of death. Shame on you Job, for your inconsistency.

If you look back at chapter 3, you have to agree with Eliphaz. He has accurately analyzed Job's cry of anguish. It is nearly pagan, if not clearly pagan, in its view of life. Eliphaz was right, for Job was not on the level where a godly man ought to be. If he was right, then why was he so poor a comforter? Because, Eliphaz, like so many people before and since, had the mistaken idea that what is true must always be good. If Job is being inconsistent, let him know. If a Christian brother or sister is being sub-Christian in their emotions, point it out right away. Such is the role of the analyzer, but it is not the role of the sympathizer.

A truly sympathetic friend is not concerned with setting you straight, but with understanding why you are so crooked. Eliphaz should have said something like this: "I understand your feelings Job. I would feel the same in your shoes." He would not have to give up his convictions about how people ought to respond to suffering. He could say, "I know it is not right to feel as you do, but I would probably feel the same, if I were in your shoes." Sympathy always comes through by saying, "Even if I don't like how you feel, I accept you as you now feel."

Job did not hear that at all. He heard only an accusation designed to shame him back on the right path. Eliphaz was using his wisdom and energy to push Job, rather than help him lift his burden. When you have sympathy, you don't tell the sufferer to get rid of his burden, you help him carry it, and feel something of the load he bears. Charles Parkhurst put it, "Sympathy is two hearts

tugging at one load." Eliphaz only added to Job's load with his accusations. He is a mirror, however, in which I can see myself. He is not a bad, or cruel man, he is just stupid about human nature. Put yourself in the shoes of Eliphaz, and imagine that you witness an outstanding Christian going to pieces. I am sure one of the first responses in our minds would be, "Why doesn't he practice what he preaches."

Like those around the cross, who said of Jesus, He saved others, let Him save Himself, so we look at the strong and godly in suffering, and expect them to set the example, and save themselves. We certainly don't expect them to be depressed, and cry out in despair as Job did. We would be embarrassed by such a lack of faith. We would probably seek to shame them back into their senses by some form of accusation. "What will people think?" "You have told others how to handle grief, now practice what you have preached."

Let's face it, it is a fact of which we are all aware, it is easier for us to preach than to practice. It is so much easier to know what is right, than to do what is right. Paul experience this, and writes in Rom. 7:15, "I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." All of us will have times when we cannot do what we know to be best, but we will do what we know to be folly. Thomas Boston preached that failure to sleep soundly was a great waste of time. Then he fell into a state of restlessness, and could not avoid the very thing he condemned. He preached on the text, "Be content with such things as ye have," and then later found himself seized with dissatisfaction.

Every Christian fails at some time to practice what he has preached. Eliphaz made a big deal of pointing out to Job his inconsistency, and by so doing, missed his chance for being a comforter. Job was not so stupid he did not know he was being inconsistent. He did not need a lecture on his defects at this point.

They were already crushing him. The suffering saint who feels depressed and angry at life, is fully aware of his inconsistency, and that is why guilt is one of his heaviest loads. What he needs is someone who can sympathize. He needs someone who can say, "You are not the worst sinner who ever lived, because of your negative feelings."

True sympathy recognizes it is no sin when you can't feel like you ought to feel. Jesus said to His disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled," and then went into Gethsemane where His heart was so deeply troubled it almost broke. Jesus did not sin by this inconsistency. He experienced what we all do, and that is why he is the perfect sympathizer. He knows that there are griefs and sufferings and trials that come into our lives that make it impossible for us to feel the positive emotions of life. We do not have to feel the death of the negative emotions like Job, but we do have to understand that they are legitimate, and there is no call for accusation about not practicing what is preached. Job needed a word so sympathy, but he never got it. The second approach of Eliphaz was equally empty of comfort.

II. HIS ARGUMENT.

In verse 7 we see just what every sufferer needs, and argument that shows them they are wrong to feel as they do. Eliphaz says to Job, think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or, where were the upright cut off? The wicked reap suffering and judgment from God, and the righteous reap reward from God." The argument of Eliphaz is a classic case of oversimplification. It does not deal with life as it really is, but only as his theology says it should be. Eliphaz is trying to give Job a snow job. He is trying to whitewash over the blackness of Job's tragedy, by pretending that there is no real evil for the man of God. Only the wicked suffer. The good guys never suffer, and what seems so is really good for

discipline, and other values. So cheer up Job, if you are truly righteous, your suffering is no tragedy at all. Some may get comfort from this type of argument, but many see it as rejection, as Job did.

How can there be any real sympathy if you are convinced there is tragedy. You do not accept the sufferer's feelings, when you try to show them they are foolish for their feelings, because they are based on a false view of suffering. I enjoyed Iona Henry's book, *Triumph Over Tragedy*. She shares of how she reacted to some of the arguments of her comforters. She lost her daughter in surgery, and then her son and husband, a week later, were killed in a car accident, which put her in the hospital for months. Some of the arguments she wrestled with were these:

1. There is a purpose in all of this. This traditional Protestant way of coping with tragedy gave her some comfort in her deepest pain, but lost its power when she recovered. It just did not fit the facts of life. Pete, Jack, and Jane, all had more talent to contribute to the cause of Christ than she had. The idea that there was a mysterious hidden purpose in saving her out of the holocaust brought her up against a brick wall. If there was any purpose, why didn't God reveal it? A hidden purpose is no better than no purpose at all. It just left her empty, and explained nothing. She could not buy that argument.

2. One of her friends, on a similar track of Eliphaz, told her that God loved her in a special way, and that is why she had to suffer so much. Those who suffer most in this life will be so much happier in the life to come. Suffering was a sort of merit, and, therefore, it really is not evil, but a blessing in disguise. Iona could not buy this one either, for it made no sense. Some of the finest Christians did not hardly suffer at all. Why would she be selected out of all humanity for this special suffering. Did God love her more than He loved most of His children? She writes, "I couldn't believe that! My

faith had taught me that God has no caste system, that He plays no favorites and has no pets, that He sends His blessed rain upon the just and unjust alike..." She could not believe she was a privileged character for her great suffering.

Other friends tried the fate approach, or the Pollyanna approach, but none of them met her need. The approach that did work was the sympathetic approach of her father-in-law. It was his son and grandchildren who died, so he also suffered deeply with Iona. His attitude is summed up by one paragraph from a letter he wrote to her. He said, "God is as sad over this as you are. It is not God's will that such things happen. Amid the many circumstance of life, some things happen because we belong to a human society. But God's will is for life to be lived to its fullness. When it isn't, He stands as of old, weeping with us." This view met her need, and strengthened her faith. This is what Job needed, but he got an argument instead. The third approach of Eliphaz is common, but cruel.

III. HIS ASSUMPTION.

In verse 12 Eliphaz really comes on strong, as he relates to Job the frightening vision he had one night. God gave him a special revelation that no man, no angel, nothing or no one, is pure before God. All need the discipline of suffering to be worthy, and only the wicked resent it. In other words, "Watch your tongue Job. God revealed to me that you deserve what you are getting, and if you keep up your rebel spirit, you will get even worse."

Eliphaz could not have planned a less sympathetic approach. The assumption that his dream became the standard by which all men's experiences are to be measured, would make any man angry. Whenever you attempt to impose your experience, however spectacular it may be, upon others, and especially others in their suffering, you cannot escape being guilty of sinful sympathy. John

Wesley was going to sail from England to Georgia, but George Whitfield, the great evangelist of the day wanted him to stay in England. Before the ship sailed he went to Wesley and said, "God spoke to me in a dream and told me you were not to go." Wesley said, "If God does not want me to go, He will speak to me in my own dream."

Few things are more aggravating to a sufferer than a non-sufferer who has a text, or a theory, or a vision, or whatever, that wraps it all up in a nut shell. Eliphaz was saying, "I got my idea direct from God, and so you have to swallow it or else you are rejecting God's word." This is the method by which strong leaders control the weak-minded masses. Many sufferers would have submitted to such impressive arguments. Job, however, was no ordinary sufferer. He would not submit to any argument that did not fit the facts of reality.

Job's response to Eliphaz in chapter 6 is one of total disappointment. Job needed his three friends, just as Jesus needed His three closest disciples in Gethsemane, but in both cases they were let down. In both cases the three friends were good and godly men, yet they failed in the crisis, because they lacked sympathy. Cannon Farrar wrote, "A man may lose position, wealth, and even health, and yet live on in comfort...but there is one things without which life becomes a burden-that is human sympathy.

We will find a lot of truth in the speeches of Job's three friends, but it is all in vain, for even truth is empty of value and meaning when there is no sympathy. Any theology that drives the springs of sympathy, however true, is of little or no value to God or man. H. C. Trumbull preached to the inmates of a prison, and he said, the only difference between himself and them was the grace of God. Afterward, one of the prisoners came to him and said, "Did you mean what you said about sympathizing with us, and that only the

help of God made you differ from us?" When Trumbull replied, "Yes, I really meant it," the prisoner said, "I am here for life, but I can stay here more contentedly now that I know I have a brother out in the world."

This prisoner was so changed by the power of sympathy that he received the Christ that enabled Trumbull to express it. The changed life lead to receiving a pardon. Instead of sinful sympathy, he experienced sin-freeing sympathy. Philip Crownell said, "None will deny that the one thing supremely characteristic of Jesus, Son of God, is his sympathy. For that is what he is, God's incarnate sympathy." Sympathy is thinking with the mind and heart of Christ, and this is what every sufferer deserves to experience from Christian friends.

6. SANCTIFIED SYMPATHY Based on Job 4

Sometimes you have to hurt others to help them. Iona Henry's case is a prime example. She had been in the hospital for 83 days on Demerol. She became dependent upon this drug for sleep, and escape, for she could not stand to think of her future without her husband and two children, all of whom had been killed. The doctor told her she had to learn to sleep on her own, but she just could not do it without Demerol.

One day a nurse came into her room and whispered to her, "I heard something awful today in the nurse's dining room." "Tell me! What did you hear?" responded Iona. The nurse let her have it. They are saying that you are becoming a dope addict. Iona became so furious. She could never remember a time when she was so completely angry. She blasted their gossiping tongue, and vowed to show the smart alecks she was no dope addict.

In a fit of rage she picked up a book and began to read. It was already hot, and her angry rebellion made it worse. Her bed was soaked with perspiration. When the two innocent student nurses came with her Demerol, they stood wide-eyed in shock when she refused. "The doctor ordered it," one of them stammered. "I don't care," she raged. "Take it away." So they did. Iona said she felt like the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace, and equally determined. It was a night of horror, but she was committed to die before she would ask for her Demerol.

She fought all night, and wanted to give up a dozen times, but just before dawn she dozed off. When she woke up she was greeted like a victorious queen. She had conquered Demerol, but she, and everybody else, knew it never would have happened if she had not been motivated by strong anger. Anger can be a friend that gives us the energy we need to fight an enemy. Anger can be good, and the nurse's did her a big favor by making her angry. Inoa's need at that point was not for sympathy. What she needed was an internal motivation to fight a weakness that could have destroyed her.

Job's situation was not the same things at all. Yet his friends provoked him to anger. It is possible that the rage in his heart, that kept him fighting back against their accusations, was of some value. It did motivate him to think, and argue, and could have been good for his circulation. There was no hint, however, that the friends were acting in Job's best interest. They were just stubbornly interested in getting Job to conform to what they felt was a proper response to tragedy. The anger they kindled only made Job's misery worse. Job did not need the same medicine that Iona needed. His need was for a bridge of sympathy from which he could cross over from despair to new hope. We often fail, as did Job's friends, because we do not diagnose the need properly.

I must confess that I have assumed the same thing as Job's

friends were assuming. I have dealt with suffering people, thinking that what they needed was an intellectual explanation. Like Job's friends, I was too quick to give what I had, rather than listen to what the sufferer needed. Someone wrote, "The intellect alone never produced real sympathy. The will alone never can. It is born of loving desire working with and in these." The comforter must be ever asking, what does the sufferer need, and not, what can I do? If you ask this latter question, you are striving to meet your need, and not theirs. This is where Job's friends failed him. They did not love enough to enter his feelings. They sought to change his feelings by their intellect, and this makes people feel rejected, for they are not being accepted as they are.

If you observe Jesus in relation to all kinds of people, you will see that He always accepted people where they were. He did not approve of where they were necessarily, nor did He expect that they would stay where they were, but He always started with them where they were, and not where He thought they should be. That is what sympathy is. It is accepting a person where they are, even when where they are is not acceptable. The woman at the well is a good example. She was not living a life style acceptable to Jesus, but He accepted her where she was, and the result was a changed life style. This is what sympathy is all about. It is the ability to be with another person where they are, and feel what they feel, and communicate that you understand. Sympathy is the heart of fellowship, and the key to oneness in Christ.

Someone said, "Sympathy is your pain in my heart." Animals apparently cannot experience this. They have feelings, but not sympathy. They can eat heartily while their friend or family member lay dying, with no tear of pity, or sigh of sympathy. Only man has this unique capacity to weep with those who weep, and also to rejoice with those who rejoice. Sympathy includes the positive sharing as well as the negative emotions.

Eliphaz had the capacity to sympathize, but he quenched it by responding to Job's depression with a defense of what is right and best. Let's not do to Eliphaz what he is doing to Job. Let's sympathize with Eliphaz, and try to feel what he was feeling. Job was the one hurt deeply, but he forgave him in the end. It is quite easy to understand Eliphaz. My tendency is to do the same thing he is doing. If someone is negative, I want to rush in and counteract it with the positive. If someone is down on life, I want to present to them the joys of life. If someone is attacking God, I want to defend God. It is perfectly normal to respond to any negative with a desire to counteract it, for the good of the one held in its grasp. But it is not good just because it is normal.

One of the key lessons of the book of Job, as I see it, is just this: What are normal and natural human feelings are not necessarily the best. What we need to see is that the normal is tainted with sin, and is below the level where God expects us to live. Knowing this, we can then, by His grace, go beyond the normal, and natural, to feelings and responses that are pleasing to God, and helpful to man. It was normal for Eliphaz to respond to Job with a defensive attack. Think of your own response to the folly of your children. How many have said, "How can you be so stupid?" "You know better than that." "You should be ashamed of yourself."

The sympathetic mind says, "I will let these natural and normal impulses remain unexpressed until I put myself in the other persons shoes." You do not really know another person until you try to do this. George Eliot said, "The only true knowledge of our fellow man is that which enables us to feel with him." Had Eliphaz put himself in Job's place, and tried to inner into the feelings that would arise in such a tragic circumstance, he would have been a comforter, rather than an irritant.

Before you criticize anyone for their feelings, and negative

emotions, try to put yourself in their shoes, and feel what they feel. This sympathetic approach will cause you to resist the normal response of criticism, and come through with an attitude that comforts and encourages. The key to being a good counselor is sympathy, and the key to being sympathetic is honest self-examination. What would I do or feel in the same situation? That is why Jesus is the supreme sympathizer. He has been there, and though He never fell, He knows how easy it would have been with the defective nature all other men have. We have this fallen nature, and, therefore, should be able to easily develop the power of sympathy. Ella Wheeler Wilcox put it into poetry-

I treasure more than I despise
My tendency to sin,
Because it helps me sympathize
With all my erring kin.
He who has nothing in his soul
That links him to the sod,
Knows not the joy of self-control
That lifts him up to God.
So I am glad my heart can say
When others slip and fall,
Altho I safely pass that way,
I understand it all.

This poem points out a vital truth: You do not have to fall, to sympathize. You do not have to actually experience what another does, to understand. You have the capacity to feel, to some degree, what it would be like to have the actual experience. Eliphaz could have felt what it would be like to lose his whole family and all his possessions. Maybe not to the same degree as Job, but enough to grasp what Job was going through, and to sympathize.

Christians who do not suffer often fail to use their capacity to

enter the suffering of others, and the result is, they are often like Job's friends, and very unsympathetic. Vance Havner refers to this in his book *Though I Walk Through The Valley*. He watched his wife die, and went through a terrible time of depression. He writes, "We read in the Bible of a great multitude who have come out of great tribulation. I have joined the society and their fellowship is precious because they know. They do not make light of my troubles. Only fair-weather travelers who have known little sorrow do that." Havner, a great evangelist known by millions, obviously had to contend with some of Job's friends. That is, Christians who could not grasp his sorrow and depression. They were critical of such a man of God feeling as he did.

God forbid that we should ever be so callous, and a pain to any member of the body of Christ. It is easier for those who have suffered deeply to be more sympathetic. Those who are more likely to be like Job's friends are those who have not suffered, and do not bother to develop the power of sympathy. Most of us are in this second category. The more we can feel with others in that which we have not experienced, the more we become like Christ, and can minister to others with a truly sanctified sympathy.

7. JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS Based on Job 5

There is a poem that I have enjoyed for many years, but I could never see how it could be used in a sermon, until I began to study the friends of Job. I want to share it with you, for it both describes them, and gives us insight into why they could be so wrong when they were so often right. It is called *The Blind Men and The Elephant* by John Saxe.

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much incline,

**Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.**

**The First approach the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to ball:
"God bless me! But the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"**

**The second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"**

**The third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"**

**The fourth reached out a eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
" 'Tis clear enough, the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"**

The fifth who chanced to touch the ear,

**Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"**

**The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"**

**And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong.**

Job's friends were each partly in the right, but all were in the wrong. The reason is the same as for the blind men. They were blind to all of reality but their own narrow perspective. They had found their piece of the puzzle, and declared that to be the puzzle. It was all so easy to solve, for there were no complexities to deal with. The friends of Job explained life's sufferings, and specifically Job's sufferings, as very simple and obvious. They said there is no mystery here at all. It is clear as a bell that suffering is God's judgment on the sinner. Job is suffering, therefore, Job is a sinner.

We know Job was not suffering due to his sin, and God was not chastening him for any failure. But we do not know this about others who suffer, so how are we to deal with them? The same way Job's friends should have dealt with him. They should have been

willing to admit the mystery, and not pretend to know what they did not know. It is one of the worst forms of pride to be unwilling to confess ignorance. Everybody is ignorant concerning many of the mysteries of life, and especially the mysteries of suffering. The first thing you will do about suffering, if you are wise, is not to jump to conclusions. That was the mistake of the blind men, and Job's friends. They had their theories about things, and immediately began to declare them as the sum of all wisdom.

The second thing we learn from their mistakes is, do not deal with people and their problems as categories, but deal with them as individuals. Job was an unique individual, and his suffering did not fit any general category. This is not to say there is not general category, for there is. There is suffering that is the chastening of God. There is suffering that is the result of sin. There is suffering that is the result of ignorance. There are valid general categories, but it is a mistake to take any individual sufferer, and cast him into one of these categories, without adequate study of his individual situation. This takes time, and communication with the individual to gain understanding.

Job's friends just assumed that Job fell into a certain category, because they could not see any other category where he would fit. This was a sin, and they needed to be forgiven to be right with God. It is a common sin to be guilty of, this treating people as categories, and not as individuals. The more you study the controversial issues of life, the more you realize that there is usually some truth on all sides. Some will have truth that applies to many situations, and others will have truth that fits different situations. The wise Christian is one who refuses to assume that there is only one way to look at an issue. Life is complex, and each individual situation must be dealt with on its own merits.

Take divorce for example: Some Christians argue that it is never the will of God, but others are equally convinced that it can be the will of God. The Bible would support both. It is never God's best, but it is sometimes the lesser of two evils. It was for their hardness of heart that God granted the right of divorce in the Old Testament, but the point is, He did grant it, and not because it was good, but because it can be the best thing in a bad situation. The Bible does not take a hard nosed one sided stand, with no exceptions. Jesus clearly stated an exception, and established that a Christian must deal with each situation on its own merits.

If we follow this through on all kinds of issues on life, and especially the issue of suffering, we will avoid the folly of Job's friends. They were rigid and inflexible. They responded to Job like they would a drunken bum who ended up behind bars. They said, "You brought this on yourself Job. By your sin and rebellion against God." They knew of no sin he had committed, but because they only had one category to put him in, that of a sinner, they jumped to this conclusion. They had no category of righteous people who suffer unjustly. Their false attitude, and inability to deal with issues on an individual basis, forced them to be cruel to Job. To comfort him would be to encourage a sinner in his rebellion. Their motive was noble, and they thought they were being the best of friends, but they blew it because they refused to deal with Job as an individual.

There was no room in their thinking for an exception. Even God was not allowed to be free in their theology. He had to be, and do, just what they said he had to be, and do. He could not relate to an individual on a unique basis, but had to relate to all people the same. He was like a giant cosmic computer programmed to conform to their concept of who he was. This explains God's anger at the end of the book. God said to Eliphaz, and his two companions, in 42:7, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends: For

you have not spoken of Me what is right..." God was not pleased with all of their eloquent praises of His power and majesty, for they distorted it to make God look as cruel as they were.

God finally came to His own defense, because these so called defenders were making Him look terrible, until Job was beginning to think God was his enemy. God and men desire to be dealt with as individuals, and not to do so is to lose compassion, and become a cold and callous counselor. John R. Thomas was judged by some to be a hard hearted boy, while others felt he must be a lad of great faith. Both miss the boat, for they judged him by putting him into a category based on external evidence, rather than getting to know him as an individual. As chaplain of a state hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, he tells his inner story. When he was ten or eleven his mother taught him how to respond to the question, what are you going to do when you grow up? He was to say, "When I grow up to be a man, I'm going to take care of gran."

Gran was his mother's mother, who lived with them. All of the ladies who visited were so impressed with this young boys devotion to his grandmother. "What a wonderful boy," they would exclaim. As he grew older, he realized he did not want to devote his life to caring for his grandmother. He wanted a life of his own. When she died, his sisters and brothers were all weeping, but he was not sad at all. Some of the relatives thought he was not sad because of his faith that she was in heaven. Others thought he was cold and heartless. Those who took the pains to know him as an individual understood that he was relieved by her death, for he had been made to feel he was responsible for spending his life caring for her. His fear was now relieved, for she was gone. The innocent little game his mother started led to John having a unique attitude in this particular situation. It could only be understood by dealing with John as an individual, rather than a category.

When Jesus teaches us not to judge, this is one of the things He was getting at. Don't judge people on the basis of mechanical categories. If you are not going to take the time to get to know them as individuals, and understand them as unique persons, then just refrain from making any judgments, for that is an immoral way to deal with people. People who suffer struggle with their own self-image, just as Job did. They ask, am I really a worth while person? Would I be better off dead? When such sufferers are treated without regard to their individuality, they feel rejected, just as Job did.

The wise counsel we received in seminary was helpful, and life has confirmed its value. Never be shocked at anything you hear, but except the person where they are. No matter how wicked the sin; how deep the grief; or how rebellious or bitter, you accept it as a normal response for that person, at that time. If you can not accept negative emotions, as Job's friends could not, then you have no business being a counselor of the distressed. You will do much harm, because you will be frequently jumping to conclusions.

8. DISCOURAGING COMFORT Based on Job 5

Emilie Lorning in her novel, Swift Waters, tells the story of a young single pastor who fell in love with a beautiful young woman in his congregation. She learned to play the chimes in the tower of the church, and when she learned the pastor's favorite hymn, she would play it frequently. There was great difficulty for either of them to communicate how they felt about each other, and so the relationship did not develop.

It took a calamity to bring them together. The community was struck by a sudden flood. She was caught in the church and had to

flee to the tower for safety. As darkness fell, a great searchlight moved about illuminating the flooded city. As she followed the light, she spotted her lover rescuing a family from the roof of a nearby home. The light moved on, but when it returned she saw the last child put in the boat, but her lover sinking in total exhaustion. His thoughts were that he had done his best, and now, since there was no one who needed him, he was ready to die.

Meanwhile back in the church tower it dawned on her that she could do something. She sprang to the controls, and sent out over the waters the notes of his favorite hymn.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come;
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

When this message in music reached his ears, he knew whose hand was at the controls. A new surge of strength filled his being, and he swam to safety to find life and a love that even flood waters could not quench. This is not only a good love story, it illustrates the tremendous power of encouragement. A drowning man can be saved by encouragement. It can make the hopeless hopeful, and the despairing feel like living again.

Encouragement can spur men on to tasks they would never do without it. D.L. Moody told of a fireman climbing up a burning building to rescue a child. The wind swept flames came so near he wavered, and he considered giving up, but someone in the crowd below said, "Give him a cheer." The crowd roared its encouragement, and with fresh courage the fireman went on to save the child. In the day of judgment, said Moody, those who did the cheering shall in no wise lose their reward. To be an encourager is to be in God's will.

The great Dr. F. B. Meyer said, if he had his ministry to live over again, he would preach more sermons of encouragement to God's people. Its a shame that Eliphaz did not hear Dr. Meyer before he went off to visit Job. If anyone ever needed the rejuvenation that encouragement can give, it was Job. Unfortunately, none of the three friends of Job had the gift of encouragement. If they did, it was well hidden. Job was drowning in a sea of lonely despair, but instead of hearing the lovely music of encouragement, Job heard only the discord of criticism. The result is, Job is not a love story, because even though all of the characters in the drama are friends, they are empty of sympathy, and so there is seldom heard an encouraging word, and so the skies are just cloudy all day. The saying, "With friends like that who needs enemies?" Must have originally been a reference to Job's friends.

Nothing hinders growth and achievement more in the Christian life than does discouragement. It is one of Satan's most effective tools for fruit reduction in the life of a believer. The fruit of the Spirit can only grow in the sunlight of encouragement. This being so, the book of Job makes clear that one of life's greatest tragedies is that believers do not comfort and encourage one another, but rather are often discouraging. That is what we see Job's friends being to him. The paradox is, they did it by using that which is true. Commentator after commentator on the book of Job is impressed with the eloquence of Eliphaz. He is a master theologian. He has a profound grasp of the principles of life. So much of what he says is excellent material for expounding on the glory and majesty of God.

Why then does God call him foolish at the end of the book? Because he misapplies his wisdom. He says the right thing, but always in the wrong place, and to the wrong person. Truth out of context can become folly. This explains why something that is true does not necessarily encourage us. Being true is not enough. Ideas must fit the need, or their truthfulness is of little value. There are

millions of things that are true, and even important, but they are not relevant in times of grief. We see this so clearly in chapter 5 of Job. Hopefully this study will teach us how not to do it. Eliphaz meant to be a comfort, but instead he was a master of discouraging comfort. The first thing we see is,

I. DISCOURAGEMENT BY COMPARISON.

Eliphaz compares Job to a fool who does everything wrong, and so deserves to suffer for it. What he says about the fool in these first few verses is perfectly true. They call upon gods who will never answer, and never give them support. They kill themselves by their foolish anxiety and bitter rebellion against life. Their children perish because of their background that prepares them only for misery. The fool eventually loses everything, and brings all the troubles of life upon himself. It is as natural for the fool to get into trouble as it is for the sparks in your campfire to fly upward.

Everything he says is true, and can be supported by other Scriptures. Why then is Eliphaz classified as a fool himself, for he is giving an accurate description of a fool's life? It is because he is implying that it fits Job's situation. He does not come right out and say so, as the other friends will later do, but you can count on it, Job felt the cutting edge of the comparison. Trouble does not just happen, he says to Job. There is always a cause for it, and the cause is folly. The degree of your trouble makes it obvious that you have been and utter fool somewhere along the line. Eliphaz could have written a book on the power of negative thinking, for he was an expert.

My reading, and possibly your own experience, suggests that what the grief sufferer really wants is neither positive nor negative thinking, but rather, a caring presence. The last thing they need is what Job is getting here-a comparison with the sufferings of others

that throws the burden for the whole thing back on him. Many times we suffer and have to confess that we have been foolish and to blame. We have brought it on ourselves, and must bear the responsibility of the pain. But to make this the cause of all suffering is to be cruel, as Eliphaz was being cruel to Job.

Let me share some testimonies of some suffering members of the body of Christ. They reveal that the sufferers greatest need is sympathy. They are encouraged by those friends who can just accept them where they are, and not try to explain things by comparing their suffering with that of others.

1. John Thomas is the chaplain of Mendota State Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. He lost his wife to cancer after a seven year battle. He went through a period of grief, and he wrote, "When I was able to share my loneliness and hurt other people responded. With only two exceptions, people did not try to cheer me up. I found that to be important because it said its okay for me to feel loss and grief and crying, its all right to be this way now." Eliphaz could not do this. He could not accept Job's grief and depression. He saw it as a defect that proved he must be guilty of great folly. Job made the same mistake with his wife. He could not accept her grief, and said, "You speak like one of the foolish women." It is hard to just accept people where they are, but it is the only way to be of comfort.

2. Janette Klopfenstein has written two books about death and grief since her husband died suddenly at age 29. In her book, My Walk Through Grief, she tells of her battle with depression. "Those who came and cried and shared a feeling of loss were much more supporting than those who came as comforters and said nice words. Canned phrases about life must go on, and Bible quotes about the mysteries of God, and the goodness of God's will, especially when quoted by those who had not faced a devastating death, seemed glib indeed." This speech of Eliphaz is filled with the very things that

discourage most who suffer grief. It is not only the negative approach he begins with, but even the positive approach of trying to cheer him up with glorious theological truths.

There is good news here for those of you who never know what to say. Don't feel bad, for it seems that most all of the mistakes are made by those who have something to say. The evidence of life says, the less you say, the better. Just say you are sorry and be with them, and listen. Job's friends never became a problem until they opened their mouths, and began to explain everything.

3. Joseph T. Bayly lost three grown sons to disease and accidents. He is one of the great Christian grief sufferers of our day. In his book, *The View From The Hearse*, he writes, "We are most likely to be helpful with an economy of words. In our context with people at death...it is easy to say too much, to talk when we ought to listen. I was sitting, torn by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God's dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly, and he said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except to wish he'd go away. He finally did. Another came and sat beside me. He didn't talk. He didn't ask leading questions. He listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go."

The grief sufferer can say to every friend, you light up my life either by your coming or by your leaving. The goal is to be one who comforts by being present rather than absent. Eliphaz could have encouraged Job by remaining silent, or by leaving, but he had to explain everything to Job, and make sure he understood why he was suffering. Thomas John Carlisle, a modern poet, writes, "It is a large order for friends to stay shut up, and Job was no luckier than we. It is the subtle and grateful superiority of the non-sufferer that gets us. He is glad that he isn't in our boat, but he bids us keep an elevated chin, and not rock anything. He knows he can go home

unscathed not being at our address or in our shoes. This leads us to look at the second paragraph of the speech of Eliphaz which reveals-

II. DISCOURAGEMENT BY CONTRAST.

First he compares Job to the fool who does everything wrong and suffers the consequences, and now he contrasts Job with the wise man who does everything right, and so always comes out smelling like a rose. The wise man, of course, is himself. In verse 8 he says, "As for me, I would seek God and commit my cause to Him." In other words, if I were in your shoes Job, I would not be carrying on in this scandalous way, but I would surrender to God, who would reverse my fortunes, and raise me up. God does not raise up the foolish and the wicked, who seek by crafty schemes to get their own way. He brings them to defeat, and since that is where you are, you are obviously not responding to God like I would.

Eliphaz is again implying that Job is missing the boat by not confessing, repenting, and casting himself on the mercy of God. He is saying that if Job was really as spiritual as he is, he could solve this whole mess, but apparently he is unwilling to surrender. There is a very subtle assumption here that may influence all of us. Eliphaz is assuming that just because Job is unfortunate he must be on a lower level morally and spiritually. In other words, Job is no longer on the same plain with the prosperous non-sufferer. His suffering makes him inferior to his advisors. It all fits his little theory that dominates his theology, which is, that the fool suffers, and the wise prosper. It is all so simple, but it is the cruelest theology around. Eliphaz could not grasp the idea of the sufferer being one who was still in God's will.

Eliphaz looked into the mirror and said, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, whose the wisest of them all." Then he stood there pleased as it reflected his own image. He thought, I am healthy and prosperous

because I seek God. Job, in contrast, is sick and in misery. The only explanation is that he does not seek God. He must be a fool and not wise like me. Eliphaz is a victim of his own theology, and he was one of Job's heaviest burdens. Satan's work was swift, but the torment of his friends was slow agonizing torture. The third thing we see in this chapter is the greatest paradox of all-

III. DISCOURAGEMENT BY COMFORT.

In verse 17 Eliphaz says, "Happy is the man whom God reproves, therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty." Eliphaz goes on for the rest of his speech describing the victory that Job can experience over all the evils of life. The future is bright he is saying to Job, if you only repent and respond as God desires. He ends this chapter with a word of authority by saying, "We have searched this out Job, and it is true." If you know what is good for you, you will listen, for this is the medicine you need for a cure. Job, of course, vomits at the very thought of their medicine, and they are deeply offended. They are even more convinced than ever that he is a wretched sinner. They had given Job their best shot. Their comfort was the best they knew how to give, and Job rejected it. Obviously Job must have deep spiritual problems to reject our wisdom and advice, was their conclusion. They never dreamed that Job's problem was their advice and comfort.

Let's examine this comfort to see how it can be that something true and good can be such a pain. The truth of what Eliphaz says in verse 17 is beyond dispute. Both the Old Testament and New Testament teach it clearly that the Lord chastens those whom He loves. It is so undeniable that even the pagan world accepts its validity. Nevertheless, it is irrelevant to Job's situation because it doesn't fit. This truth cannot be applied to all suffering of God's children, for it makes a mockery of God's love and Fatherhood. Any father who would chasten his children by germ warfare, and giving

them a disease, or by breaking their bodies, or destroying all that they love, would be justly locked up as a disgrace to society.

Here we have Job's friends trying to get him to swallow a theology that says, all your tragedy is God's way of making you a better person. It is the chastening of the Lord that ought to make you rejoice, for it shows He really cares. This is, in fact, a valid piece of the puzzle in dealing with the mysteries of suffering, but when this piece is forced to fit where it does not fit, it is folly to try and make it fit. It ought to be obvious to a blind man that Eliphaz is trying to apply a truth where it just does not belong. Death and destruction is not a chastening. If it is from God, it is wrath and judgment, and not anything to be happy about.

It is tragic when theologians try to apply a truth to every situation. It is like the wisdom I read one time that said, "Death is nature's way of telling us to slow down." This is no more ridiculous than Eliphaz trying to tell Job that all is well and the future is bright, because all you have suffered is just the chastening of the Lord. This kind of comfort is a mockery of God and also of the depth of Job's grief. He did not just lose the local bowling tournament, or five hundred dollars on the stock market-he lost everything. This theology, which is so true in life's minor trials and setbacks, is so false when applied to a major calamity. Charles Simeon says the major fault of these men of piety was their, "Continual misapplication of the sublimest truths." May God help us to see from their mistakes that the truth of any statement is no justification for its cruel and uncharitable application. Eliphaz almost had to endure God's chastening for his false use of the idea of chastening in relationship to Job's suffering.

Eliphaz was going to make this truth fit Job even though it was like Saul's armor on David. No wonder Job resisted and rejected it. He was wise to do so, just as David was wise to get out of the armor.

The armor was good armor, and doubtless could have saved many a warrior in battle, but it did not fit David, and would have been a hindrance to his victory. So this truth about chastening is a real Biblical message that can be of great help in many situations of life. But when it is applied where it does not fit, it is folly and hurtful.

The friends of Job lacked the ability to be flexible about life. They were like computers locked into a pattern of response. As soon as they saw suffering, their mind registered sin. They had no other category in which to think. They were not prepared to consider the possibility of a righteous sufferer. If the righteous suffered was the chastening of the Lord for their sin. There was no other category. They could not deal with individuals, but only with categories. They did not listen to Job, or try to understand his unique situation. He just fell into a category, and they responded automatically as they would to all in that category. Everything is black and white, and there is no room for individual differences. They were not open to a God who deals with us as individuals; a God who could deliver Peter from prison, but let John the Baptist die there. Their theology was fixed, and any thought of flexibility would be considered compromise.

Jesus was rejected because of thinking like Job's friends. They were Godly men who did it, for they thought they were the defenders of the faith. They said God is one, and no man can be God. They were right, of course, but they were not flexible enough to see that God had the freedom to become man, and he also had the capability of being three in one. In other words, they locked God in and said, He can do nothing outside of our system. Jesus did not fit their theology, so they crucified Him. Job's friends are verbally crucifying him because he will not fit their system.

One of the most important lessons we need to learn from the word of God, and from history, is that everybody is an exception.

That is, you do not deal with any person on the basis of a system. Such legalism is condemned by the Word and history. The only Christlike way to deal with people is to treat everyone as a unique individual. Do not categorize people and classify them, and then whip out your chart to see what your response should be. This may seem very scientific, but it is cruel, and a rejection of the person. Job's friends were discouraging comforters because they never did listen to him and treat him as an individual.

Jesus did not have a book of rules to tell Him how to deal with different categories of people. The Pharisees had that book. He did not see a leper and say, in this case I must cross the street and pass on the other side. He did not confront a prostitute and say, in this case I must not speak to her or be touched by her. He did not encounter a Publican and say, I dare not eat with this kind of man. Jesus had no such rule book. He dealt with all people as individuals, and the result was, He had no prejudice, but was able to minister to all kinds of people equally. Job's friends would rather fight than switch, but the purpose of the book of Job is to help us see, if we are like them, we need to switch and deal with people in a Christlike way. Job's friends show us how not to do it. Jesus shows us how to do it. He was the great Comforter. If you want to be pleasing to God, and a pleasure to man, be an encourager to those who suffer, and do not be one who gives discouraging comfort.

9. JUSTIFIABLE COMPLAINT Based on Job 6

Disraeli, as the Prime Minister of England, was once walking with a friend. As they went along the street in London, they met a distinguished looking gentleman. Disraeli greeted him, and asked, "How is your old complaint?" The man responded that it was getting worse, and he was sure it would be the death of him. Disraeli and his friend walked on, and the friend asked him who that

gentleman was. Disraeli said, "I haven't the faintest notion." " But you asked him about his old complaint," protested the friend. Disraeli replied, "I have found that almost everybody has some complaint, and they like to talk about it." Here was a man who knew human nature. He knew that some negative feeling lurks in the heart of just about everyone, and even those for whom life in general is okay. How much more is this the case for those who suffer life's worse trials? The question is, is it wise to express your complaint?

To complain or not to complain, that is the question. The book of Job forces us to ask this question. The obvious answer is no, we ought not to complain about life. After all, nobody likes a complainer, and a horse cannot be kicking and moving forward at the same time. The poet wrote,

A horse can't pull while kicking,
This fact I merely mention,
And he can't kick while pulling,
Which is my chief contention.
Let's imitate the good old horse,
And lead a life that's fitting.
Just pull an honest load and then
There'll be no time for kicking.

Job's friends were saying something like this to him about his negative reaction to his tragic circumstances. Eliphaz has just told him to be happy with the chastening of the Lord. Job fires back and answer in chapters 6 and 7, and it must have made their ears tingle, and their blood boil, for Job insists that he has a right to complain. In 7:11 he comes to this conclusion, "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."

Job meets fire with fire, and we are compelled at this stage of the conflict to start choosing up sides. Job is not lily white in all his suffering. Before this conflict is over, he too will have to repent for much of what he says. The issue now, however, is, does he have a right, and the freedom to complain? His friends said, "Knock it off. It is not proper for a man of God." Job says, "You guys don't know beans about suffering. It is not only right, but it is necessary and normal. You expect animals to stir up a fuss if they don't have food. You understand the beast, but you criticize me for crying out when I cannot eat, because life is as tasteless as egg whites without salt." If Job is right, those who complain that we ought not to complain are the ones who have no right to complain.

Spurgeon says that Job speech here is primarily a justification of his right to complain. Job argues back using the same categories as Eliphaz used in his speech. Eliphaz used comparison and contrast, and Job responds with a comparison and contrast of his own. Let's look first at Job's-

I. COMPARISON.

Job compares the weight of his grief with the sand of the sea. He argues that such a great measure of weight justifies complaint. Job is saying, "Look you guys, this is not much ado about nothing. I am being crushed, and you offer me counsel that fits a man who has just found a worm in his apple, or a pit in his pie, or a pebble in his soup. I am not making a mountain out of a molehill. You guys are reducing my mountain of tragedy to a molehill of triviality. I cannot begin to exaggerate the heaviness of my soul. The weight of my calamity is so enormous that the sands of the sea cannot match it. The sand of the sea was a typical figure used to describe what is infinite in number or weight."

Job's defense is that the degree of the load does make a difference

in what is acceptable behavior. The teen-age boy who jumped off a bridge and killed himself, because his favorite TV show was canceled, was off balance. A cry could be acceptable behavior for that degree of disappointment, but more than that is abnormal. People have taken their own life for all sorts of trivial reasons, like missing a train, or low grades. Job wanted to die too, but in his case it is a normal feeling. There is not a normal man alive who can suffer what Job suffered and not complain, and feel that life is too bitter to swallow anymore. Great men have wanted to die for much less.

Moses wanted to die because his people were so discouraging. Elijah wanted to die because he felt so alone and discouraged. These two great men of God could have been lifted from their pit of depression by some good positive thinking, but this would have fallen flat with Job. Anyone who thinks positive thinking is always the cure, has not faced reality. If you were counseling Job, and wanting him to look at the bright side of things, what would you tell him? Would you say, it could be worse? Do you suppose he would have been encouraged if you told him he might have had eleven or twelve kids who were killed, instead of just ten? Positive thinking is of most value to those who are suffering because they have been too negative in their thinking. Job thinking had nothing to do with his tragedy, and so no change in his thinking could make a difference.

There are times when negative thinking is a necessity. It may be a necessary evil, but it becomes a necessity. The greatest men of God all through the Bible and history practiced what we are calling justifiable complaining. We could also call it, therapeutic negative thinking. David says in Psalm 142:1-2, "I cry with my voice to the Lord, with my voice I make supplication to the Lord, I pour out my complaint before Him, I tell my trouble before Him." This is what is called catharsis. It is a pouring out of the poison inside, which is necessary for healing. Job is not alone in his complaint about life's

trials.

Some may object that Old Testament saints are not our guides. Sometimes Old Testament behavior is sub-Christian, but the study of suffering reveals that those who suffer without complaint are the ones on the sub-Christian level. In other words, if you suppress your emotions so that you can take everything life throws at you without complaint, you are not being Christlike at all. You are conforming to a pagan standard. Let me explain that. Back in 300 B.C., a man by the name Zeno started a philosophy called stoicism. It basically said that you will find happiness by suppressing all emotion. You must learn to destroy all the weakness of emotion, and face suffering and death with no sorrow, and the good things of life, with no joy. It was a back to nature type philosophy, where the goal was to get rid of human emotion, and learn to be like the animals. Animals do not cry or complain when a loved one dies. The goal of the Stoics was to be as indifferent to suffering as a worm. Whoever heard a worm complain?

Epictetus, and early Stoic, said, you need to harden your emotions by breaking something in your house everyday, and say, "I don't care." You keep moving up to more expensive things until you can see your pet killed and say, "I don't care." The ultimate perfection is reached when you could see your whole family wiped out, like Job did, and simply turn and walk away saying, "I don't care."

The Stoic said everything is God's will, and so you are to discipline yourself to accept everything, however tragic, without struggle or emotion. Some of our popular sayings come from the Stoic view of life. "Grin and bear it; that's the way the ball bounces, the cookie crumbles, and the cake breaks." Emotions were evil to the Stoic. Both laughter and tears were obscene. The nicest compliment you could give a Stoic was to say, "In all the years I've

known you, I've never seen you show any emotion." This extreme is rare today, but the gist of it has come into our culture. The American Indians followed this philosophy, and so did many of the white pioneers. It still survives as part of the tough rugged American image, and is behind every parent who says to his weeping youngster, "Big boys don't cry." All of the Bible big boys did cry, but even little Stoics did not cry. The Stoics seem so virtuous when they opposed negative emotions, but this is really sub-Christian.

Seneca was one of the great Stoics. He lived the same time as Jesus did. He taught that anger was a hideous emotion, and one should never show it in the slightest degree, even though he beheld his father murdered, and his mother raped. He ends his long essay on anger like this: "There is no surer proof of greatness than to be in a state where nothing can possibly happen to disturb you." According to this view, Jesus was not great, for He expressed a great deal of emotion. Neither the Old Testament, nor the New Testament support this pagan philosophy. The Bible says God made man much higher than animals, and just a little lower than angels. His emotions are one of the things that make him unique. God expects man to be an emotional creature. He is made to feel all of the positives of joy, and the negatives of anger and suffering. A man is only truly healthy when he can express his feelings. Every feeling has a legitimate right to be expressed.

Paul said we are to be angry but sin not. There is a sinful way to express anger, but there is also a good and right way. Paul did it, and so did Jesus. All emotions can be right in the proper situation, even those that we see Job expressing. This is hard for many believers to accept, for it seems to lead to inconsistency. That is what Job's friends were accusing him about. A man of God should not be negative. Job says that is blind, unrealistic idealism that does not fit reality. Job is a great comfort to millions of God's children who suffer. His response, and his theology does fit their actual

experience of life. He did not pretend to be a super-spiritual sufferer who could just grin and bear it, and say praise the Lord anyway. He treated tragedy with respect by feeling it, and expressing those feelings. There was no escapism with Job. He got no comfort by trying to deny the reality of evil. Many believers often try to pretend that there is no evil. This is not healthy at all. Job is healthy, for he condemns evil for what it is.

Job demonstrates the beauty and the duty of inconsistency. Let me be clear here, it is never valid to be morally inconsistent. It is never a virtue to disobey God. But there is an inconsistency in feelings that is an important part of the Christian life. Job is a great example, and we need to learn to apply this truth to our own lives. Philip Cronnell, president of Kansas City Baptist Theological Seminary, in his book *Survival Of The Unfit*, has a chapter on the saving grace of inconsistency. He calls true inconsistency a breathe of life, and the key to Christian freedom that prevents error, and preserves sanity.

Christian who cannot be inconsistent are like Job's friends. They are locked into a rut of conformity that does not permit them to experience the fullness of reality. Cronnell says, "The man who, in a right way, can be boldly "inconsistent" can live on both sides of a truth." Job was this kind of a man. He could be honest with all of reality. Those who cannot, like his friends, tend to become either heretics or bigots, because they are so afraid of being inconsistent, they refuse to acknowledge that there is another side of the truth. The globe of truth is too massive to handle with a single hand. This is not only a great lesson of Job, but of the entire Bible. If we do not grasp the need for inconsistency, we will have a hard time making progress in Christian maturity.

Inconsistency is like the play in the steering wheel that allows you to go one way or the other. Those who demand that there be no

inconsistency are trying to drive with a locked wheel. They will soon be in the ditch, because the road of life is full of curves, and if you are not prepared to adjust to the changes, you will be forced off the road. Let me give you a specific illustration. The Bible clearly calls us to rejoice always, and to rejoice with those who rejoice. If you look in on that side of the truth, and refuse to deviate whatever comes, you will soon be in the ditch of disobedience. How will you obey the command to weep with those who weep, and fulfill the ideal of, blessed are those who mourn. There is a time to laugh, and a time to cry, and the Christian must be prepared for both, for it is a blessed inconsistency to be free to be all things to all men. Job's friends lacked this freedom, and were very poor comforters because of it.

Only the inconsistent Christian can be a whole and healthy Christian, for we must be inconsistent to deal with reality, which is so variable. Job's friends kept trying to say that life is always consistent. The good always prosper and the evil always suffer. Job said you can go ahead and live in your fantasy world, but I must live where I am, and where I am it is not that way. I live in a world where the good suffer, and where they have to let off steam by complaining and being angry, in order to keep from cracking up. I am so miserable I want to die Job said. You tell me, to be consistent with my faith, I should be happy, but you are the abnormal ones. It is normal to be inconsistent, and to feel the reality of tragedy, and to express strong emotions in suffering.

Who is correct in this debate? Christians will be found on both sides. The friends of Job were wise and godly men. How do we know for sure which is the example to follow? As Christians, we go to the ultimate source, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Did Jesus have only positive emotions, or did he also have strong negative feelings? The facts make it clear, Jesus agrees with Job. There are justifiable complaints in life, for Jesus was sinless, yet we see Him

complaining of both His friends and His enemies. It is a startling fact that when God entered flesh in Jesus Christ, He did not enter it in its pre-fallen state, but, rather, in its fallen state. Jesus was sinless, but He still lived in a body that could suffer the effects of sin. He suffered cruelty, injustice, and death, all of which are the result of the fall. Paul says in Rom. 8:3 that God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Jesus did not take on a fake body, and one which was not of this world. He took one just like ours. It was able to feel pain and suffering, and even temptation. Jesus experienced all of the weaknesses of the flesh. He was tired and hungry. He was angry and disappointed. He knew sorrow and grief. Jesus took that human body into the presence of God, where He will ever be one with man. It is transfigured now, but Jesus will never forget what we must endure in the flesh. He is ever sympathetic with our suffering and grief. The cross is the culmination of identification. On the cross Jesus experienced the worst that evil could do to man. On the cross Jesus wears our humanity, shares our infirmity, and bears our iniquity.

In living a real human life we see Jesus doing the very things we often feel guilty for, because Job's friends keep telling us this is not proper for a child of God. Jesus felt frustrated with His disciples, and He complained of their dullness. He said, "O men of little faith, do you not yet perceive?" Several times Jesus complained of their lack of faith. He experienced even deeper frustration with those He came to save. When they would not listen, He wept. This would have seemed inconsistent to Job's friends, but it is the beautiful inconsistency of a compassionate heart that feels like breaking when men miss God's best.

Jesus was aggravated with James and John, who wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans. Jesus said you are not of

my spirit. He rebuked Peter and said, "Get thee behind me Satan." To His three closest disciples He complained, in His saddest hour, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" One hour is all he asked from those who were to receive eternal life from His suffering. The point is, Jesus felt negative emotions, and He expressed them. We haven't even looked at His anger at injustice and hypocrisy. He blasted the Pharisees, and cleansed the temple with great anger. The life of Jesus confirms that Job's emotions were legitimate. Jesus was completely honest with His human emotions, and He cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" That is the essence of what Job's complaint is all about. In the light of the cross, we must agree with Job's defense, and recognize his was a justifiable complaint.

10. SELF DEFENSE Based on Job 6

Some of you may have visited the famous Carlsbad Caverns of New Mexico. I have not, but I have read about how the ranger guides the group to a place where they are seated on stone benches. Then all of the lights go out. Suddenly it is as black as black can be. You can hear water dripping you never heard before. You know there are a hundred people around you, yet there is a strong feeling of being alone. Some who have been there say there is a feeling of oppressive darkness. Another way to get this feeling of aloneness and heaviness is to suffer great loss, like Job did. The difference is, Job could not turn on the light and dissolve the load that lay so heavy on his heart.

Friendship is supposed to lighten the load, but in Job's case, his friends made it even heavier. If there was some way to weigh burdens, it could very well be that Job would be in the Guinness Book of Records as the man who, next to Jesus, bore the heaviest load of grief in history. Jesus is the record holder, for He bore the

sins of the world. His load was heavy beyond our comprehension. We can grasp the load of Job, somewhat, but the weight of our Lord's grief is beyond calculation. We read in Matt. 26:37-38, where Jesus took His three disciples into Gethsemane, and He began to be sorrowful and very heavy. He was grieved, and in great distress. In the New English Bible Jesus says, "My heart is ready to break with grief." Weymoth has, "Is crushed with anguish."

Jesus complained for the same reason Job complained: There friends did not recognize the load they were bearing, and offer to give them a hand. It would have take so little for them to lighten the load, and add some light to the heavy darkness, and establish what Wordsworth describes:

**That blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery,
In which the heavy and weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened.**

The burden of Jesus was just ignored by His disciples. This is what often happens when the great suffer. Everybody assumes they can handle things, and do not need the aid and encouragement of their inferiors. It is a tragic mistake, for even Jesus needed the comfort and sympathy of His disciples. Job's friends were not just indifferent. They felt compelled to argue, scold, and reject him for his negative expressions of grief. Having no one else to defend him, Job comes to his own defense, and as his own lawyer, argues his case before the court of history.

Job's major argument is that there is some negative things in life that are natural, and they ought to be accepted by believers. Job is not saying that these negatives are good, he is just saying they are a part of life that we must face up to, and not try to escape. They are

like pimples on the body. There is nothing good about them, but we have to accept their presence if we are going to deal with them. One of the criticisms of Christians is that they cannot accept the reality of tragedy. They refuse to accept the fact that evil is real, and that things do happen in this world that are victories for the forces of evil. Christians escape tragedy by denial. They say it is all really just mysterious good that we don't quite understand.

Philip Yancy in his book, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, tells of a funeral he attended for a teen-age girl killed in a car accident. Her mother wailed, "The Lord took her home. He must have had some purpose....Thank you Lord." Here is a typical Christian escape. She felt the tragedy, but she could not admit it was tragedy. She could not accept her emotions as truth. She had to assume it was really good, and give thanks to God for it. Paul did say that in everything we should give thanks, but not for everything. Christians who thank God for everything are not facing up to the reality of evil. This is escapism. By so doing Christians exalt all the works of the devil to the level of admiration. They call black white by denying evil and calling it good. I can just hear David following this line of thinking. "Thank you Lord for taking Bathsheba's husband home in that battle today." God did not take him home. David murdered him. To say thank you God is to thank God for murder, which He hates.

Thank God Job did not say thank God. Such a denial of tragedy would have ruined the value of this great book. Job defends our basic human right to feel the reality of evil and its tragic consequences. It is true that Job did not have our New Testament hope. Tragedy is overcome in Christ, for all evil can do, at its worst is deny the Christian time. It cannot take from him the eternal life he has in Christ. This does greatly modify tragedy, and give us the victory, but even so, it is superficial not to recognize that tragedy and evil are still real. They cannot win the war, but they do have the

power to win battles, and this can hurt terribly. We are not to grieve as those who have no hope, but we are to grieve because evil is real. Death is an enemy, and it can rob us of values that are precious. Even if it is only temporary, it is still tragic and not good.

Job's friends were deniers of tragedy, but Job would not swallow their weak medicine. He preferred to live in the real world, and not in a world of ivory tower theory. Job not only knew that what happened to him was tragic, he also knew that the way his friends were treating him was also tragic. He did not submit to their criticism without rebellion. Show me a person who feels he is being treated unjustly, and I will show you a human volcano that could erupt at any time. Jesus exploded when He saw how the religious leaders were ripping off the masses in the temple exchange. Jesus did not deny the reality of evil, and submit to everything as the will of God. He identified evil, and fought it with powerful emotions, as well as actions. He did not say, "Thank you Father for these crooks." He labored for their elimination.

Job, we must remember, is also the good guy as he fights back with powerful emotions. We are not saying he was as pure as Christ, but the fact is, he was right, and his friends were wrong. G. Campbell Morgan, that prince of expositors, sees in Job's defense that which is admirable. He writes, "There is majesty in the impatience of Job with the men who philosophized in the presence of agony, and it is impossible to read without a consciousness of profound sympathy with the suffering man."

Job takes off the mask, and his pious friends do not like it. They do not consider his honesty acceptable social behavior in the presence of godly people. They looked upon Job's honest emotions as in offense, like swearing in the presence of a lady. They expect him to wear the mask of hypocritical acceptability. It is better to grieve within, and not let others know, for this makes it hard on

them, for they are embarrassed with honest emotions. They expected Job to respect their right to be free from other people's burdens. Why should we have to listen to your groaning and moaning when life is just dandy for us? They wanted Job to play the role described in this poem:

**Though I am beaten,
Nobody shall know.
I'll wear defeat proudly;
I shall go
About my business
as I did before.
Only when I have safely
Closed the door
Against friends and the rest,
Shall I be free
To bow my head
Where there is none to see.
Tonight I will shed my tears;
Tomorrow when
I talk with you,
I will be gay again.
Though I am beaten,
Nobody will guess,
For I will walk
As though I knew success.**

Job's friends would have been proud of him had he given such a speech. But Job disappointed them, and let his negative emotions out, right in their presence. Job was wise, and those who go the other route often end up hardened, bitter, cynical, and disillusioned, for they place themselves in a self-made hell of loneliness that God never intended for any of His children. The whole idea of the people of God is so that every person might have a company of friends and

sympathizers to help him bear whatever burdens life brings.

Job's friends were more concerned about theology than about him as a person, and the result is, they failed to be what God wanted them to be. Job's sorrows were not lightened, but made heavier by them. They were to him like Peer Gynts onion. He peeled it and peeled it, and could find no core. It was all outsides. So Job's friends also revealed no real core, or heart, or inner man. They were all outsides with their cold external system. They could not be honest with Job, because they could not accept that being honest with all of life, is the only way to be pleasing to God. Those who become the greatest helpers to those who suffer are those who express honestly their own negative emotions.

In 1967 Joni wrote of how she felt in her suffering. "Once again, I desperately wanted to kill myself. Here I was, trapped in this canvas cocoon. I couldn't move anything except my head. Physically, I was little more than a corpse. I had no hope of ever walking again. I could never lead a normal life and marry Dick... Why on earth should a person be forced to live out such a dreary existence? How I prayed for some accident or miracle to kill me. The mental and spiritual anguish was as unbearable as the physical torture." She was so utterly helpless she could not do anything to end her life, and in angry agony she suffered and complained.

It would be easy to conclude that the suffering of a young girl cannot be taken as a valid example of Christian feelings. What about mature people who have lived long, and have faced a multitude of life's trials? Let's look at their feelings, and see if Job is supported by history. Let's look at how a great man like Michelangelo faced grief. This genius, whose art has caused millions to praise God, knew what it was to grieve. He wrote in a letter, as his close friend was dying, "I am in great affliction here. Urbino is

still in bed and very seriously ill. I do not know what will come of it. I feel this trouble as though it were my own son, because he has lived in my service 25 years and has been very faithful. Being old, I have no time for form another servant to my purpose, and so I am sad exceedingly." Just how sad is that? Michelangelo wrote this after his servant died: "...The better part of me is gone with him, nor is there left to me ought but infinite distress."

When I read this, my mind jumped immediately to the apostle Paul. He responded in a similar way when he had a dear friend near death. In Phil. 2 he writes of Epaphroditus in verse 27, "Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." Paul openly confesses he would express deep grief if he had lost this dear friend. It is established, therefore, beyond a shadow of a doubt: negative feelings are a normal and acceptable part of the Christian life. There is nothing Christian about being a Stoic. Job was absolutely justified in his self-defense.

11. WHY? Based on Job 7

Paul Aurandt shares this true story of James Macie. He was an illegitimate child, which is really a foolish idea, for it is the parents that are illegitimate, and not the child, but as is so often the case, the stigma of this followed him for life. The laws of England, in the 18th century, denied him the rights of any ordinary citizen. He was born in 1765, the illegitimate son of a British Duke. He abandoned his mother in France, and then returned to England. James was made a citizen, but with limitations.

He could not enter Parliament.

He could not hold public office.

He could not hold any job under civil service.

He could not enter the army or navy.

He could not be a member of the church of England.

He was bitter at these and other limitations, and when he grew up and became a noted scientist, he could not be knighted, as were his colleagues. The constant rejection by his country led him to reject them. When he died in 1829 he left his wealth to the United States of America. He had never been here, but by willing his fortune to the U.S. he disinherited the country that had disinherited him. He wanted the money used to establish an institution to increase knowledge, and perpetuate his true family name, which was denied him in birth. It was the name Smithson. The result is, we have in our capital the vast storehouse of cultural and scientific accomplishment-The Smithsonian Institution. All of this was a gift from one who was called illegitimate.

God has used so-called illegitimate people all through history. He also uses so-called illegitimate questions to accomplish his will. One of the greatest of all so-called illegitimate questions is the question why? Job in verse 20-21 specializes in this question. In the Revised Standard Version we read it three times.

- 1. "Why hast thou made me thy mark?"**
- 2. "Why have I become a burden to thee?"**
- 3. "Why doest thou not pardon my transgression?"**

Why in the world the idea ever became so wide spread that we are not to question God, is a mystery. The Bible is full of it, and Job is an expert at it. I have had people come in deep distress with a heavy load on their minds, and they will begin, "I know we are not suppose to question why-but," and then they share their burden, which is a questioning of why. My question is, why should we not ask why? Why should this most natural and universal of questions be considered illegitimate? It makes no more sense than the custom of calling an innocent child, illegitimate.

**Why should our whys be suppressed? Why is simply a
acknowledgment of mystery, and a probe into the darkness for more
light. It is the natural response of the child to the unknown.**

**Why muvver, why
Was those poor blackbirds all baked in a pie?
And why did the cow jump right over the moon?
And why did the dish run away with the spoon?
And why must we wait for our wings till we die?
Why muvver, why?**

**It is foolish to tell a child he is not to ask why, for he will only ask
why, and then what will you say? For there is no good reason why
we shouldn't ask why, since we do it from childhood to old age.**

**Why?
This is the cry
That echoes through the wilderness of earth,
Through song and sorrow, day of death and birth.
Why?
Why?
It is the high
Wail of the child with all his life to face,
Man's last dumb question as he reaches space:
Why?**

**This was the question our Lord asked on the cross. "My God,
My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"**

**Why in the world is the world so full of whys?
Why are tears so frequently torn from people's eyes?
Why in this world of laughter is it someone always cries?
Why in this world of the living is it that everybody dies?**

It is not only not wrong to ask why, it is wrong to not to ask why, for to never be puzzled by the mysteries of suffering is to be sinfully indifferent to that which touches all mankind at some point. He who never asks why is dead from his dandruff down. Why is not only a permissible question, it is an indispensable, and there's no basis in the Bible, or in logic, to forbid its use. It is not a illegitimate question, but one that is both legitimate and profitable. We cannot live in the shadow of this twisted question mark, but we must walk under it from time to time, even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Our comfort is in the fact that Jesus has already been there, and He leads the way, understanding why we ask why. Every thinking man asks why in the face of terrible tragedy. It may be the why of anger, or the why of frustration, or even the why of mere curiosity, but no mind can be totally devoid of the question why.

Why, is a cry for meaning, and God has so made us that we can handle most anything when there is meaning. The question why does not have its origin in man's sinful rebellious nature. It has its origin in the original image of God, in which man is made. It is a good and a godly question, and can move us in the direction of discovery of the meaning we need for victory. Rob a man of his right to ask why, and you deny his manhood. You reduce him to a mere machine, which is to have no concern about its function or destiny. Man refuses to be a mere machine. He wants to be treated on the level of a person, made in the image of God, and worthy of some answer to life's mysteries. To be sure, questions can be a nuisance, as most parents are aware. Even adults ask many foolish questions. One elevator operator got so tired of people asking him the time, he installed a clock in his elevator. Now everyone asks him, "Is that the correct time?"

The very first question Jesus was asked on this earth, of which we have a record, was in Luke 2:48, where Mary, after three frantic

days of searching, finds Jesus in the temple. Her first words are this question: "Son, why have you treated me so?" Jesus responded to that question with, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" The next verse says they did not understand the explanation. What we see here is that it was perfectly legitimate for Mary to ask why, but the asking is no guarantee you will get an answer that you understand. The answer was there, but it took time and growth in her understanding before it became meaningful.

We should ask why, but we should also be patient, and recognize that the answer may not be easy to comprehend. Therefore, there is a need for patience and persistence in pursuing the answer until a foundation of meaning is established. Job is famous for his patience. He kept on asking why, and never gave up until he got a response from the silent heavens. The answer he got to his particular whys was that they were based on his ignorance of what was happening. God was not punishing him as a sinner. He was not chastising him as a disobedient saint. Job asked why don't you forgive me? The answer he got from God was, "I can't forgive you if you have not offended me. There is nothing to forgive." So Job's questions were natural, but they had no real answer, because they were based on a total misunderstanding of what was going on.

So often our whys are whys of ignorance and misunderstanding. We are like the little boy being taken to surgery who cries out, "Why don't you stop them?" to his father. The little guy in tears, and full of fears, cannot understand why his dad does not deliver him, for he does not know that what is happening is for his good, and dad is allowing it because he loves him. Job's whys were in this category. He did not know that God was not down on him, but so proud of him, he knew he could demonstrate to all the universe a loyalty that could not be crushed by suffering. Job was being highly honored, but he thought he was being hotly hated. We do not know how many of our whys fall into this category, but doubtless there are

many. It is the great hope of the ages that one day the senseless will make sense.

Meanwhile, our whys will continue, and they will be like Job's whys. Job wanted to know why things were as they were, and why things that could be, were not. In other words, why is evil so evident, and why is good so often hidden? These two whys cover the vast majority, if not all, of the whys of men, and we want to focus on each of them. First-

I. THE WHY OF PRESENCE. verse 20.

Why am I the target of all the arrows of affliction? Job is being very personal. It is not the philosophical question of why so much suffering in the world, but why me? Orlo Strunk tells of rushing his wife to the hospital with a ruptured appendix. Right across the hall was a woman who kept crying out, "Oh, why me Lord? Why me?" These groans kept up for hours, and made everybody nervous. Some patients closed their doors, and others complained. Here was a woman who had become so obsessed with the question why, she became a neurotic who spread her gloom to everyone else. Most do not get so obsessed, but most who suffer deeply do ask the question, why me?

Even if we do not suffer personally, we still cannot escape the reality of suffering all about us. The news is full of stories that make us ask why. Why should Christians come home from church, and be killed at the hands of intruders? Why should such a lovely Christian girl suffer rape? Why should a concert pianist lose his hands in an accident? Why should a bus load of children perish? Why should a missionary be killed on his way to the mission field? Not a day goes by without reason to ask why. Why are there so many things present in this world that are miserable and evil?

During a scene in Eugene O'Neill's play, *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, one character asks another, "Will God forgive me?" The response is, "Maybe God can forgive you for what you have done to me, and maybe He can forgive me for what I have done to you, but I don't see how God can forgive Himself." This was his way of asking, why does God allow the presence of so much evil in the world? Why the starving children? Why the cruel murder of masses by bloodthirsty tyrants? Why the earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and multiplied forms of suffering? Many a doctor has vowed to take the cancer cell before the throne of God, and ask why? This is not the cry of the blasphemer only, it is the cry of the believer. It floods the heart and mind of the son, as well as the skeptic; the devout, as well as the doubter; the redeemed, as well as the rebellious. Many who feel it is wrong to ask these whys need to see how common they are in the Word of God.

1. For 7 years the Israelites were at the mercy of the Midianites. They would come and destroy their crops and treat them like slaves. Gideon, a great man of God, said in Judges 6:13, "If the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us?" God did not say to bypass that skeptic, who dares to question my providence. Instead, he chose this man to be the one to set Israel free. The man with enough gumption to ask why is the man with enough motivation to do something about it.

2. In Ex. 5:22 Moses cries out, "O Lord, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me?" Did God move on from this questioner to find somebody more docile? No, He chose Moses to lead his people out of their bondage. God did not chose a yes man, one who says all is well, and I can accept everything that is. Instead, He chose a why man, one who could ask why is everything so rotten, and why is there no relief? A why man is ready for action to change what is wrong. A man who does not wonder why, is not likely to be part of the answer.

We don't have the time to examine the many whys of the Bible, but we do want to focus on the fact that Jesus was, in His humanity, also a why man. I found 21 places in the New Testament where Jesus asked the question why. He asked, "Why do men reject the best? Why are men so materialistic? Why do we worry so? Why are we so critical and fearful? Why do we put God to the test? Why are we so skeptical and doubtful? Why don't we use our heads? Why don't we believe? Why the injustice? Why am I forsaken?" For anyone to say it is not right to ask why is to question the sinlessness of our Savior.

II. THE WHY OF ABSENCE.

Job is not only bothered by what is, but by what isn't. Why does God not pardon my offenses, and forgive my sin? Life could be better and we know it, so this provokes many whys. The more you know of the goodness and grace of God, the more you ask why, when that goodness and grace seem to be absent. Geddes MacGreger points out in his book, *The Sense Of Absence*: The atheist cannot sense the absence of God. This is an experience for believers only. In other words, a believer will have more whys than the non-believer. A man who does not believe in God has no reason to ask why. If there is no God, and no purpose to life, then there is no reason to ask why. Why shouldn't life be a hodge podge of meaningless and chaotic tragedy if it is all a colossal accident in the first place. The unbeliever has no basis for asking why. It is the believer who has the basis, for he feels deprived of what he knows is good.

It is the one who has had love who is most aware of its absence. Only those who have seen can sense the absence of light. Those born blind do not sense it, for they have never known it. You cannot miss what you never had. MacGreger wrote, "Only where there is a very distinctive and powerful awareness of God can there be an

excruciating sense of absence. What this means for Job is that his very closeness to God, before his suffering began, is the cause for the depths of his sense of God's absence.

The paradox is this: The greater your nearness to God, the greater will be your suffering in his absence. Only the greatest saints feel the pangs of God's absence. No one but Jesus could plummet to the depths of his why, on the cross, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me". This was the ultimate why of absence, for in that why we see Jesus baring our hell. Hell is the absence of God, and Jesus was there. When we say it was hell on earth, that is a legitimate way of describing the deep sense of God's absence. Job went through hell on earth, for he felt it deeply. The point is, it is all right for the believer to ask why. Something is wrong with a believer who does not ask why when he feels the absence of God. Job is a perfect example of how a believer should feel.

It is only the atheist and unbeliever who should never ask why, for they do not know God, and so cannot feel his absence. Why implies a meaningful and purposeful universe, and so if God is eliminated, then you also eliminate meaning, and so have no basis for asking why. Paul makes it clear in II Cor. 5 that the absence of God is a part of our Christian experience. It is in fact a necessity for there to be a distinction between this life, and our life with God in heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord Paul says. And to be present in the body is to be absent from the Lord. What Paul is saying is that there can be no perfect communion with God in this life, for body life makes it impossible. In the body we only get a taste of God's presence. That means the body also forces us to taste His absence. Paul did not enjoy the absence of God, and that is why he says he would rather be absent from the body, and at home with the Lord.

Paul did not know why he had to go through so much suffering,

and he felt deeply the absence of God, but he was a victorious sufferer, for like Job, he never lost faith in the goodness of God. His aim was to please God no matter what, and that is also why Job is a hero. His whys were the legitimate whys of one who knew there had to be an answer, and he never gave up until he found it. There is even a touch of humor as we read the closing lines of this chapter. Job says please hurry God and forgive me, for if you wait much longer you'll come and find out you went too far, and I will be gone.

We see Job's whys are the whys of the believer. He is serious in his questioning of God, but he was also serious in his loyalty to God. His faith is illustrated by these words found on a wall in Cologne after World War II.

**I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining;
I believe in love, even when I feel it not;
I believe in God, even when He is silent.**

Job does not offend God with his whys. Instead, he makes God proud of him, because of his patience and persistence inspite of having no answer to his whys. C.S. Lewis in Screwtape Letters has Satan warning one of his demonic servants about the facts of life in the great warfare of good and evil. He says, "Do not be deceived, Wormwood, our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring but still intending to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys." Satan gains no victory when the saint ask why. He only wins when the saint ceases to seek for an answer, or ceases to live in obedience to God till he has all the answers.

All through history the saints of God have cried out with Job and Jesus, why? Vance Havner is a modern example. He has gone through great grief in his later years as a servant of God. One of his

heaviest burdens has been his Job's friends. Listen to his testimony. "Whoever thinks he has the ways of God conveniently tabulated, analyzed, and correlated with convenient, glib answers to ease every question from aching hearts has not been far in the maze of mystery we call life and death. At this writing I never knew less how to explain the ways of Providence but I never had more confidence in God." He also said, "We cannot always trace God's hand, but we can always trust His heart." You have the right to ask why, if you are determined to be faithful even without the answer.

Whys are not only to be asked, but to be answered. God asks His own whys. "Why will ye die and not live." Jesus asks, "Why will ye not believe and follow me?" "Why will you not trust me and receive abundant and eternal life?" If you have not received all that God wants you to have in Christ, the question God has for you is, why?

12. JOB AND SELF-ESTEEM Based on Job 27:1-6

Cornelius Vanderbilt, the New York millionaire, back in 1853, entered the Moon Lake Lodge as the talk of the town. The chef was an Indian Chief named George Crum. He was one of the greatest chefs, but even he could not know everything. So when Vanderbilt ordered, what was then the newest craze from France, he was not sure. French fries were a favorite of the elite. They were new, exotic, and exclusive. When Vanderbilt's plate came, he complained that the fries were too thick. He had just been to France where they were much thinner. They were returned to the kitchen.

The chef was not surprised. The well-to-do were often fussy. However, when the next batch was also returned he was irritated. George took his knife and sharpened it to a razor like edge. He grabbed a potato and sliced it paper thin. He dipped them into

boiling fat, and when they were crisp he delivered them to the Vanderbilt table himself. It was done to insult him, but when Vanderbilt tasted it he liked it, and believe it or not, that angry chef had created a new dish that became a world wide favorite-the potato chip. Had an Indian chef never gotten angry at a millionaire, who he thought was a fussy snob, none of us may have ever heard of, or eaten, a Potato chip.

Conflict often leads to values that none of the parties involved could ever foresee, for that was certainly not their intention. We see it in the book of Job with a heated conflict he is having with his friends. They are aggravating and provoking him, and he is coming back with answers that reveal, that as miserable as he is, he has not lost his sense of self-esteem. He hates what has happened to him, and he loathes his sickness, and his sores, yet he has such a high view of himself that he refuses to submit to the pressure of his friends. You might say this is a sign of his pride and stubbornness to keep up this role of self-assertion. This could be a sign that Job was a sinful man after all, but not so! The fact is, it is his high sense of self-esteem, and his determined self-assertion that made him the man God had such confidence in. A man with weak self-esteem would never have been allowed by God to go through such a test. One of the values of this book is that it makes us aware of the importance of self-esteem. We could live without potato chips, but none can live as God intended without self-esteem.

Job is dogmatic in his self-defense. He will never, as long as he lives, and has a breathe, deny his integrity. There is no compromise here. Job knows he is not a wicked sinner being punished. It is injustice, and he will never give in to this injustice, and bow before it. You can call Job one of the most stubborn men who ever lived, or you can call him one who knew the great value of self-esteem. What we see here in chapter 27 runs all through the book.

10:7 Job says to God you know I am not guilty.
12:3 Job says to his friends I am not inferior to you.
12:4 Job says I am righteous and blameless.
13:18 Job says I know I will be vindicated.
16:27 Job says my prayer is pure.

Many would look at all of these self-evaluations, and conclude with Job's friends, he is proud, conceited, and just too stubborn and self-centered to admit when he is wrong. Job's attitude toward himself forces us to wrestle with one of life's major issues, the issue of self-esteem. This is a complex issue because the whole world is in on it. The public is exposed to many books on self-assertion and self-esteem. The cult of self worship is one of the largest, and is a natural fruit of the growth of humanism in our culture.

This can lead to the Christian becoming confused, for it often seems like the world is saying the same thing as the church, and yet there are radical differences. The church has been telling youth for decades to develop self-esteem. They are taught slogans in Youth For Christ and Young Life that say they are made by God as one of a kind, and of infinite value, and God never makes junk. Dr. James Dobson is telling Christian parents that developing a high sense of self-esteem is the key to their healthy future, and Christian maturity. But along with this stream of influence there is another stream of tradition that is quite pessimistic about the self.

Christians through the ages have felt that it is a logical step from the Biblical commands to deny yourself, take no thought for yourself, and die to self, to conclude that we should be hating ourselves. This leads to all kinds of neurotic Christians who encourage others to wipe their feet on them, because they act like a dirty rug. That is an appropriate level for one who feels unworthy to rise above the worm. Their favorite song is, "Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I." Their favorite text are the

words of John the Baptist, "I am not worthy to stoop and untie His sandals." Or Paul's words, "I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle. And, "I am the chief of sinners." Like a magnet they attract all of the negatives of Scripture that make them have a low level of self-esteem.

They never seem to notice the balance of Scripture, and listen to Jesus when he said that John was the greatest born of woman under the Old Testament system. They do not quote Paul's other words when he says he is not inferior to any of the apostles, and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. They do not revel in Paul's self-assertion, when he stood up to his powerful foes and said you can't do this to a Roman citizen. I demand my rights. And Paul got them because he had a high sense of self-esteem, and was worthy of all the rights of a citizen of Rome.

The Christian who thrives on low self-esteem tends to look at Jesus only as the Lamb who opened not His mouth, as he was led to the slaughter. They do not like to focus on His defiance of the injustice of the Jewish authorities, and of his self-assertion that led him to break their laws to meet human need. It is obvious there is a need for balance in this whole area of self-esteem. We are dealing with a paradox, and must see that self-esteem is both good and bad, for it can be a vice as well as a virtue. The difference is in how you see the self which you esteem.

If, like the humanist, you worship the creature rather than the Creator, and make the self the highest end, then self-esteem becomes a curse. It makes people think they can run roughshod over everybody else, for all that matters is that they get their own way. Paul warns about the danger of thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. But with self in the proper place as a child and servant of God, self-esteem becomes one of the greatest values of life. As a sinner you know you are unworthy of God's grace, but you are

so grateful for His love and forgiveness, that you are proud to be a part of His family. Your sin and weakness keeps you humble, but God's grace and love keeps you proud, and so there is balance. Your self-esteem is not an exaltation of your fallen nature, but of your redeemed nature, and, therefore, it is a part of your praise to God.

When you love God with your whole being, you are not loving God with junk, but with the finest redeemed jewels that exist. When you present your body a living sacrifice to God, you are not offering Him trash, but one of the finest treasures you possess. When you understand that the self in Christian self-esteem is the Christ-centered, Christ loving, Christ obeying self, then you avoid all of the nonsense of the two extremes of humanistic pride and Christian asceticism. In other words, it is just as sinful and foolish to try and put down the redeemed self as it is to exalt the unredeemed self. Christians who glory in inferiority pervert the Christian faith.

It is true that riches do not save, but neither does poverty. It is true that fame does not save, but neither does obscurity. We are not saved by health, but neither are we saved by sickness. Power does not save, nor does weakness. Beauty will not get you into heaven, but neither will homeliness. The point is, it is folly to think that the opposite of what does not please God, must please God. Sophistication will not sanctify you before God, but does it follow that being unkempt will? Just because your knowledge will not impress God, does not mean that your ignorance will impress Him. Christians who are deceived by shallow thinking try to fight the sin of pride by loathing the self, and thereby please God. But nobody but the devil and his demons are pleased with a rejection of one of God's greatest creations, made in His own image. Therefore, we all need to learn from Job how to have a sense of self-esteem when everybody who should love you, does not.

Let's look at how Job's friends were constantly attacking his self-esteem.

- 1. They called him names. Two of them called him an old windbag.**
- 2. They constantly imply he is a rotten sinner.**
- 3. They throw the blame for all his suffering right in his face.**
- 4. Zopher goes so far as to say in 11:6 that Job deserves worse than what he is getting.**
- 5. They imply that he is a stupid idiot who has learned nothing from history, and is quite inferior to them, because they have, and are thus wiser.**

Most men would be pushed so low by these attacks they would have to reach up to touch bottom. Not Job! He knew the principle that none can make you inferior without your consent, and he never gave it. It was still a sin for his friends to try and rob him of his self-esteem, but he would not allow them to succeed. One of the great sins of man is his inability to love his neighbor as himself. It is the second greatest command of God, and the second hardest thing for man to do. The fall made men want to put others down that they might be raised up. This was the sin of Satan. He wanted to put God down that he might be exalted. All sin is a desire to exalt the self at the expense of others. It is the exact opposite of the attitude of John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Selfishness is based on a feeling of low self-worth. People feel they are not worthy of love and respect just for who they are. They feel they have to get worth by making someone else less than they are. The selfish person is not that way because they have too high a view of themselves, but almost always it is because they have too low a view of their self-worth. True self-love and self-esteem say, "I have value in myself, and do not need to be compared to someone else for self-worth." A person who loves themselves will not need to put others down, but will respect others, even if they are different, for he will recognize their worth, even as they recognize their own

worth.

A song goes like this: "I'm proud to be me, but I also see, you're just as proud to be you." The person with self-esteem can enjoy the worth of others, for he is not fighting them for the sake of gaining his own self-worth. The self-centered person is competing with others for worth. He is not happy with himself because it is a bore to be always fighting for recognition and worth. It gets tiresome to be always thinking of yourself. The poet put it-

Oh, let me think of bug or beef;
Of Bismark or the Caspian Sea,
Of anything to get relief
From that confounded nuisance, me!

Oh, let me think of Joan of Arc;
Of Truffles, queens and kitchen maids,
Of George the Fifth and Central Park,
Of cheese and Labor Day parades.

Grant me O Lord, no neater rhyme.
For use nor usufruct of pelf,
But just a thought from time to time
Of something other than myself!

The person with self-esteem does not need to always be thinking of himself, for he know he is of worth whether anyone is thinking of him or not. It is only those who have low self-esteem who must be ever in the limelight, and who need constant reassurance of their worth. The friends of Job are always bragging about their wisdom, knowledge, and righteousness, as they put Job down. They sound like they have it all together, and have a high view of themselves, but it is not so. It is low self-esteem that puts others down. It is low self-esteem that cannot bear to be wrong. These friends of Job are just

like the Christians who cannot face the humiliation of being wrong, and so rather than admit error, they leave a church and go elsewhere.

It is the person with a high and healthy self-esteem who does not fear that his mistake will crush him. He knows he is fallible, and he knows he can be forgiven, so he says I over- reacted, or I misjudged, or I sinned, please forgive me. He is forgiven, and gets back on the right track. Those with low self-esteem are always on the defensive, protecting their ego, and they find pleasure in attacking the life and ideas of other people, just like Job's friends.

If you tend to specialize in being down on yourself, you lack self-esteem, and you are your own worse enemy. A girl was asked, "Why don't you ever get into the discussion?" She said, "I think its better if I am the only one who knows how dumb I am." This reveals a severe case of low self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on the awareness that life is a partnership. God made us, but we play a major role in what we become. God made Eden, but He put a man there to keep it up. Adam helped to keep Eden the beautiful garden that it was. God gives man a major role to play in producing fruit in His own garden. Without God I could do nothing. I cannot make a seed, and I cannot make a seed grow to produce plants. Only God can do that. But when God does His part, I can be a partner and do things that make a difference. I can weed and cultivate. I can fertilize and water, and the result is I can feel proud of the end product, because I help God produce delicious fruit.

That is what self-esteem is all about. It is an awareness that I can do nothing without Christ, but with Him I can do much that will be a blessing to myself and others. A little girl was asked, "Who made you?" "God made part of me," she responded. "Part of you- what do you mean?" She said, "He made me real little and I just grewed the rest myself." God, of course, is also in on the growing process,

but He allows us a major role, just as He does in our garden. We have, not only a right, but an obligation to be proud of what we have done together-God and I.

The Weaver in England prayed a proper prayer when he prayed, "O God, help me always to keep a good opinion of myself." Job did not always have a good opinion of his friends, and for good reason. He did not always have a good opinion of God either, and this was because of his ignorance of what was going on. His negative views of God were partially justifiable, but the thing we see all through the book is this: Job never lost his good opinion of himself. He knew he was a sinner, but he knew also that he loved God and man, and did all he could to show that love. He did not deserve to suffer as he did. His high self-esteem kept him afloat in the flood he endured.

It can do the same for us, and as we meet around the Lord's table, we focus on the source of all valid self-esteem, which is the cross. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend." You place the highest value you can place on another person when you will sacrifice your life for them. That is how much Jesus said those for whom He died were worth. Is anyone worth the cost of the death of the Son of God? God says yes. The cross is God's revelation of how much He considers a person is worth. The more we grasp the truth of what the cross means, the higher our self-esteem will rise. Again the poet put it-

The joy of life is mine,
And cause I have to sing,
God loves me here and now,
His hand's in everything.

Life holds no terror then,
No victim of some fate.

**I love myself as God does,
And I can celebrate.**

Communion is a celebration. It is a commemoration of that central event in history that makes all of our lives worth while, and gives meaning to all of life. As we remember what Jesus did for us, let us remember that because He did it, we are the most valued creatures in the universe, and this is our basis for an everlasting self-esteem.

13. THE TREASURES OF THE SNOW Job 37:1-14 and 38:22

It was one of the strangest funerals on record. Nobody was being buried, but things were being buried in a lot of little graves, and in one, the Bible was being buried. Shackleton and his men were exploring the Antarctic when they were over whelmed by the forces of nature. Their ship, Endurance, unfortunately, could not endure the pressure of the ice, and it was crushed into splinters. Shackleton and his men were adrift on an island of ice. He was convinced their only hope was to move across the ice to the other side of the floe.

He ordered his men to sift through their belongings and reduce their luggage to two pounds each. It was a sad sight to watch as they each went apart, dug a hole in the snow, and began to dispose of their possessions. Bundles of letters they had from their wives were placed in their miniature mausoleums. Little gifts that they had received before leaving from England, and all of the sentimental things had to go, except the lightweight pictures of their wives and sweethearts.

Meanwhile, Shackleton had to make a decision as he sorted through things. What should he do with the ships Bible. It was a gift from the Queen Alexandra. It was too heavy to carry along, but

could it be abandoned? Shackleton decided to compromise. He tore out the fly leaf burying the Queens inscription in her own handwriting, and he tore out one page of the Bible. Which page would you choose to save if you could only save one? It would not likely be the one which he choose, but you would not likely be in his situation either. He selected the leaf containing the 37th and 38th chapters of Job.

They were marooned on an island of snow and ice, and these chapters reminded them that God was the author and creator of snow and ice. It seemed like a God forsaken place, but these chapters kept them aware that they were never out of the hand of God, for His hand is in all of nature. God, in these chapters, is challenging Job and all men to look at nature and learn from it why they need to stand in awe before their Creator.

That part of nature we want to focus on is--snow. There are 25 references to snow in the Bible, and we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, and so snow is to be a part of creation that teaches us something about God. Doctor Talmage, that great preacher of nature sermons, tells of two rough wood cuts he saw as a boy. They hung side by side, and one portrayed a lad warmly clothed, looking out of the door of his farm house upon the first flurry of snow. Hearing the jingling sleigh bells and the frolic of his play fellows in the deep banks, he is clapping his hands and shouting: "It snows! It snows!"

The other sketch was of a boy, haggard and hollow-eyed with hunger, looking for the broken door of a wretched home. Seeing the falling flakes is to him a sign of more cold, less bread, and greater privation. Wringing his hands, and with tears rolling down his cheeks he cries: "It snows! It snows!" Two boys seeing the same thing, but with totally different emotions. What we have here is not just a matter of different strokes for different folks. Snow means

different things to different people, but it also means different things to the same people at different times. Snow is one of those aspects of reality that is both a potential burden, and a potential blessing, and which it becomes depends a great deal upon your perspective.

Snow is a great deal like its creator. God is love, and the warmth of His grace is the source of all our comforts and joys. But God is also a consuming fire, and His judgment can be the source of great sorrow. Snow, like God, can be a blessing or a burden; a joy or a judgment. It has been both in my life as I am sure it has been in yours. You have no doubt been awed by its beauty, but also made to feel awful by its brutality.

Snow has been a major force that has determined the destiny of many people. Such was the case with Napoleon. In the winter of 1812 Napoleon marched away from Moscow with 200,000 men on a bright and beautiful October 19 morning. As the day wore on, the sky darkened, and soon the snow began to fly. Harmless little missiles, but in sufficient quantities one of nature's most deadly weapons. Multiplied billions of these insignificant flakes fell until the horses could not pull the supply wagons. The men began to fall from fatigue. Here was the army that brought Emperors to their knees, and made all men tremble. Now they do battle with the silent and gentle snowflake, and before it is over, 132,000 men perished. Such is the awesome power of snow.

Snow is one of God's object lessons on the power of unity. Get enough weak people together who could do nothing alone, and they can change the course of history by being united. It is a lesson Christians have a hard time learning. Christianity is constantly weakened by division and disunity. Christians are often as ineffective in blocking the road of evil as a hand full of snowflakes are in blocking a road. Snow is only powerful in quantity. When you get enough of these helpless flakes together there is no power on

earth can stop them. They cave in roofs, bring down wires, and stop armies. If Christians could unite in their efforts there is no force of evil that could hold them back. Jesus said the very gates of hell could not prevail against them.

It is the combination of masses of little influences that change history. It is not just great leaders, but the persistent impact of millions of Christians letting their light shine, and being the salt of the earth, that is the key to Christianity's power in the world. Forgetting this lesson of the snow has led many Christians into defeat. They weak and helpless to make a difference, and because they cannot be an avalanche, they refuse to be a snowflake, and the result is the army of evil keeps marching, and is undefeated.

If only we could enter into the treasure of the snow as Job is advised to do by God. Snow is used often in the Word of God as a tool for teaching. Job 37 and 38 are two of the great nature chapters of the Bible. In them snow, hail, ice, and frost, all of the different forms of solid or frozen H₂O, are used to illustrate God's power. Let's look at snow and see what we can learn from its power. The first and most obvious power of snow is its-

I. POWER TO PURIFY.

Isa. 1:18 is the best known text about snow. "Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow." Winter would be so ugly without snow. The landscape becomes so dead and dark, and the dirt and grime make everything ugly. But then the gentle snow falls from heaven and all is transformed. These billions of artists of the air reach down and paint this drab world bright. God never paints more beautiful than when he paints in white.

It is all done with as little noise as a cat on a carpet. The winter scarred landscape is clothed in sparkling splendor, and all of this is

nature's illustration of the grace of God. Jesus shed His blood to do for us what snow does for the world. By His death Jesus made it possible for us to cover our sin scarred nature with the glorious garment of His snow white righteousness. It too is all done in such gentle silence. Noise is not needed for power. God's power, by which He cleanses, forgives, and beautifies our lives, is a gentle power.

If you go to a factory where lace is made, you will doubtless hear the whirl of many machines, but God makes His lace in silence. Let us learn this lesson from the snow. Great and powerful things do not need to be accompanied by external noise. Powerful things can and do happen in our lives in complete silence with no noise or fanfare. We deal with God whose grace falls like snow from heaven, and our guilt is covered, our sin forgiven, and our garment of righteousness is restored to splendor before God. And all of this power takes place in our inner being with no sound whatever.

Shelley, in Prometheus Unbound, compares the silent power of snow to the silent power of thought, which can build up until, like snow, it can produce an avalanche.

**Hark! The rushing snow!
The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now.**

As Jesus entered history so quietly, and yet made the biggest change in history, so the snowy blanket of heaven is let down in gentle quietness, and changes everything. David prayed, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Snow is the symbol of God's silent

but powerful grace which covers a multitude of sins. R. E. Neighbor wrote,

**The snow! The snow!
To men below
It brings a sparkling white;
It fills the earth
With joy and mirth
With music and delight.**

**So, Christ came down
My life to crown,
To make my black heart white;
To make me whole,
And fill my soul
With rapturous delight.**

Snow is used in both testaments to describe God the Father and the Son. In Dan. 7:9 the Ancient of Days had raiment as white as snow. On the Mount of Transfiguration, and when John saw Jesus in heaven, he had garments and hair as white as snow. Snow is like Jesus, not only in that it comes down from above to cover over the ugliness of winter, as Jesus covers over the ugliness of sin, but snow, like Jesus, comes to give life and life abundant. Snow has saved the lives of many people. David Lloyd George, one of England's great prime ministers, was called the snow baby. His mother was caught in a snow storm in south Wales when he was just a baby. She became lost in the hills, and a search party was sent out. She was found dead, but she had wrapped the baby in her outer garment and placed him under the snow. To everyone's surprise he was still alive. It was one of paradox's of snow, that as cold as it was, it was the source of preserving heat that gives life.

The snow cover one the ground prevents the heat that radiates

from the earth from escaping. This warm air that is kept in the earth by the snow keeps the roots of plants and trees from freezing. The earth under the snow can be as much as forty degrees warmer than on the surface. The snow is God's blanket for the earth. It also provides shelter for rabbits and squirrels, and many other creatures who need to escape from the cold winter air. Not only is there life in snow from that perspective, but many have had the experience of the couple who crashed in a plane in the Canadian wilderness, and survived for six weeks on melted snow. The water of life is in snow, and gives us another parallel between it and Christ.

I never realize how important snow is to farmers until I lived in the country for a few years. Then I saw with my own eyes what snow does for bringing forth the fruits of the earth. Where the snow is deepest you can see the crops grow taller. There is a direct correlation between the depth of the snow and the height of the crops. Snow is a very literal treasure to the farmer. When snow falls it washes out the air, and what it washes out it brings down to the ground as fertilizer. Four major chemicals like ammonia and nitrates are brought to the earth by the snow. It would cost a farmer thousands of dollars to purchase these fertilizers that snow provides free. Everything that we eat is better and cheaper because of snow. Snow is a protector and promoter of life.

Milk-white down from the swans of the Lord,
Fleece from the Lamb of God,
Flung to the winds by the cherubs
A quilt for the sleeping sod.

We need to see the positive side of snow so we can be grateful in spite of the nuisance it is. It is part of winter, but it is also part of the defense against winter. We need to see snow flakes as guardian angels which protect the seeds from frost. They come not just to make life miserable, but to make it more fruitful and abundant. A

total perspective on snow will give us a balance view, and help us be grateful even when we complain about the problems it causes.

John Greenleaf Whittier could see snow flakes as the winter flowers that help bring forth the flowers of spring. He writes,

**Fill soft and deep, oh winter snow,
The sweet azalea's open dells,
And hide the banks where roses blow,
And swing the azure bells!
O'erlay the amber violet's leaves
The purple aster's broad side home,
Guard all the flowers her pencil gives
A life beyond their bloom.**

Paul said if there is anything lovely think on these things, and snow is one of the most lovely things in all of creation. It is so because it comes from the mind of Christ, the original of all the artistry of all creation. D. J. Burrell wrote, "Out of the mint of God up yonder falls this glorious wealth all stamped with His image and superscription." God told Job to consider the snow, for He ranks it with the stars and the seas among nature's wonders.

There are men who devote their life to the study of snow flakes. Wilson Bentley was a photographer of snow flakes, and he tells of their infinite variety. When he finds a special beauty he is full of anxiety, for if he fails to capture that beauty it will be gone forever. His job is so exciting because every flake is a new discovery. In 40 years he has never found two alike. Along with the thrill comes the despair that so few of these countless works of art can be preserved. He has photographed thousands of these exquisite beauties, but when he reflects, he realizes that all of them together would only make one snowball. He says the study of snow forces you to think of the infinite. That is exactly why God told Job to consider the snow.

It leaves you full of awe at what you can know, and even more awed at what you cannot know, because the finite cannot grasp the infinite. All of mankind together have never seen a fraction of God's master pieces of art in the snow. Julian Janus wrote,

**Snow flakes falling, twisting, swishing,
There upon my window sill.
Who of heaven's great designers
Traced your lace with such great skill?
Soft and fragile web of mystery
Falling on my window sill.
I shall wonder, ever wonder
Whose hand held that magic quill.**

One of the treasure's of the snow is that, the more you study it, the more you must acknowledge the Lordship of its Creator. Prescott said, "I think better of snow storms sense I find that though they keep a man's body indoors, they bring the mind out." Scientists, for example, tell us that about 15 tons of snow and rain fall on the earth every second the year around. The energy involved is mind boggling. To cover one square mile with ten inches of snow is equal to twice the energy in two of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima. The power and the beauty of a snow storm is awesome. It is designed by God to keep us aware of our finiteness and weakness so that we might in wisdom worship Him who has all power. Snow is the source of abundant life also in that it provides man with so many enjoyable activities. There's no fun like snow fun. Millions enjoy winter sports, and children enjoy the fun of snow as one of the great fringe benefits of God's winter carpet.

F. W. Boreham, the great preacher of Australia, tells of the time when the paper reported that snow had fallen on the hills outside the city. Friends stopped to pick him up to go see it. It was so rare that close to the equator that the road was swarming with people

wanting to see it. The experience did for him what God wanted it to do for Job. Boreham wrote, "I confess with shame that, in the days of my darkness and ignorance, I thought that prophets were few and far between. I fancied that God send one prophet to every million people. The snow flakes taught me that God sends a million prophets to every one of us. For the snow flakes are themselves prophets. They are a great and white-robed throng; a goodly fellowship; a multitude that no man can number. They are vocal with inspired speech." "Catch a snow flake on a sheet of glass; examine under a microscope, and what a triumph of architecture you have here! Not among the palaces of the Pharaohs nor among the temples of the Athenians could you find anything to rival this in daintiness, in symmetry, in splendor!" Many designers have admitted they get their ideas from the study of the Master's designer's work as they see it in the snow flake.

Yes, the heavens do declare the glory of God, but not just in the stars, but in the snow flake as well. We see there the love of God for the minute also. It is a vast universe, yet God designs every snow flake with a unique beauty of its own. It is clear that God cares for the small as well as the great. No man can study the snow and have any doubt that God cares for him as an individual. God desires every person to develop all their potential for beauty and uniqueness.

There is no aspect of life so small and insignificant that God is indifferent to it, for He is a God of minute detail. You say, what possible difference can it make to God that I have a minor problem or need? But then ask, what possible difference could it make to God that billions of snow flakes will melt unseen, yet each is made unique? Why bother with the insignificant individual snow flake? No person is lost in the crowd with God. He cares about every life, and every detail of every life. Every one is someone special to God. George Cooper wrote,

**Brave your storm with firm endeavor,
Let your vain repining go!
Hopeful hearts will find forever
Roses underneath the snow.**

**Let every snowfall remind you of the treasure's of the snow, and
let every flake remind you of the rose of God's love for every
individual.**

14. A HAPPY ENDING Based on Job 42:1-6

Job is one of the masterpieces of world literature. It is studied today even in secular colleges, and students are required to write papers comparing Job's sufferings with those of the Greek god Prometheus. I know this, because I just recently loaned a commentary on Job to my neighbor who had to write just such a paper. Victor Hugo called the book of Job, "Perhaps the greatest masterpiece of the human mind." Carlyle claimed that nothing, "Of equal literary merit," has ever been written. If it has such merit as literature, of how much more value ought it to be to us, who believed it to be the inspired Word of God? Yet few Christians ever read it, and fewer still understand it when they do. It is the story both simple and sublime. It calls for too much thinking to appeal to our age of push button results.

It has a happy ending, however, in common with many great stories. It differs from most, in that usually the villains do not end up happy. The wolves, witches, and wicked, usually end up dead or defeated, but in Job even the losers end up happy, because they are dealt with in mercy. It ends with a total triumph of God's grace. In this respect, it becomes a picture of the ultimate outcome of all

history, and the lives of all believers. This happy ending, after much suffering, is filled with so many practical lessons that we are going to consider it verse by verse.

In the chapters before this, from 38-41, God had been asking Job a whole series of questions. These made Job realize that God alone was master of the universe, and that man was powerless and ignorant before his power and wisdom. Now, in this concluding chapter, Job answers the Lord and says in-

Verse 2: I know that thou canst do everything. Job admits that God is absolute sovereign. After hearing of all of God's wisdom in making the wonders of the universe, He recognizes that nothing is too hard for God. In fact, He knows now that God can even use evil to bring forth good. The second phrase is more accurately translated in the Berkley version, "And that no plans of thine can be foiled." Or, the RSV has, "No purpose of thine can be thwarted." God is not only able to accomplish His purpose, He definitely will. However one solves the problem of evil, believers know they will all be happy in the end.

Job is submitting to God here. The arguments about suffering are over, and nothing has been accomplished, but now Job sees that the only real conclusion is to submit to God's sovereign purpose, knowing that it will certainly be accomplished. Samuel Terrein says, "Existence is fulfilled when man is aware, not of his ultimate concern, but of becoming the concern of the ultimate." In other words, the greatest knowledge in life is to know that God cares for you as an individual, and that you can trust your destiny to Him. This is a parallel to Paul's statement that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Job has arrived at certain security, even in the center of suffering. This means, even if he is not restored, there will be a happy ending, for he cast all his care upon God.

Verse 3. In this verse Job quotes the question that God asked him in 38:1-2. He repeats it in order to answer it, by admitting that he spoke out of ignorance. He had sought to justify himself at God's expense. He knew he had not sinned, and he knew he was unworthy of such suffering as he was enduring. So he said in that state of mind, it must be God who is wrong. He was right as to his basic innocence, but wrong in accusing God of injustice. Now, after God has spoken, he recognizes he was speaking in ignorance.

Theologians are often guilty of speaking of God in such a way as to hold Him guilty for evil. All men need to come to an awareness that some things are beyond their understanding. We all have finite minds, and when we speak, as if we comprehended the infinite, we obscure the issues, and encircle them with ignorance. Many debates would end as happy as this one if those involved could be made to see their arrogance in presuming to speak on the mysteries of God's infinite mind. When God speaks, even a righteous and godly man like Job becomes aware of the poverty of his wisdom. He thought he could speak on deep things, but now he confesses his folly. No man can measure the bottomless depths of the wisdom of God, and the sooner one learns this, the greater wisdom he will display in remaining silent when he is ignorant.

God be merciful to us if we ever get the notion in our heads that we fully understand Him and His will. When this happens, God is reduced to humanism. When we lose a sense of the majesty and mystery of God, we cease to be Biblical believers. The Biblical believer, like Paul, is aware, that at best, we see through a glass darkly. There is no end to the light to be gained. We have not scratched the surface of the gems of truth available to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Even if we knew all that the human mind is capable of knowing, we would have a poor concept of God if we thought we had

exhausted his wealth of truth. The truly wise man admits with Job, in the presence of God, I speak in ignorance. There are things too wonderful for me. They are beyond my comprehension. This admission leaves one always open for more light from God.

Verse 4. In this verse Job again quotes a question of God to him from 38:3. God fired a series of questions at Job, like-"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? What do you know about the stars and their order? Can you make it rain? Have you entered the gates of death?" He asked a whole series of questions about things beyond the knowledge of Job.

Verse 5. Job responds and confesses that his concept of God has been weak. It was built on hearsay rather than experience. He heard of God by means of the ear. That is, he was taught about God, and he believed in God, and was a righteous man, but after his personal encounter with God, he feels like he hardly knew God before this. It was as if he just had an intellectual knowledge of God, but now he has personal experience. He says, "But now mine eye seeth thee." This is not to be taken literal, but the experience is literal. It is like when we say, oh, now I see! We now comprehend what we did not see before.

Job is saying, now he really knows God, and has a great concept of God. He, like so many, had dragged God down into the realm of mere words. God was a subject in theology to be explained, instead of a person to be encountered. This has happened over and over again in history, and it has happened again in modern times. Men talked about the God is dead theology. They treated the three letters GO and D as if the mere word was God. They only knew God by the hearing of the ear, for He was only a word to them, a word to be debated. They did not have a personal encounter with God. In a real sense, Job's God died also, or rather, his false concept of God died when he came to an awareness of the real majesty of the living

God. Inadequate concepts of God are dying all the time, and this is good, for then people are free to see the true God, just as Job did.

Here is where our Pietistic heritage comes in. Pietism does not reject the intellect, and the need for adequate theology in words, but it says, this is not the essence of the Christian faith. Men can learn all of the right answers, and be able to explain the trinity, atonement, heaven and hell, and still not be redeemed and transformed by these truths. It is only personal encounter and commitment that makes one a child of God. Only by personal experience can one really know the reality of the true God.

Pietism, however, contains the same danger as does rationalism. The pietist can lose the sense of the wonder of God, and can get so chummy with God that he ceases to be the God of the Bible. He becomes something like an invisible friend, on the level of Casper the friendly ghost. Someone has said, "To become familiar with holiness is to deny it." When we lose the sense of the mystery of God's holiness, we cannot experience true worship. The God of the Bible does die in the human heart when He is reduced to the level of a mere buddy. Until men get a vision of God that fills their hearts with awe, they will go on babbling about God being dead, for without wonder and mystery God is dead in their hearts. In the Ballad of Rolfe Humphreys we read,

**There are no more wonders anymore.
Energy equals MC square,
And two plus two are always four,
And who are we to think we care?**

**All the enchantments, old and rare,
Are runes we cannot read; forlorn
Under persimmon-tree, or pear,
We've never seen a unicorn.**

If the sight of an unicorn would add some measure of luster to life, how much more would men truly live if they could gain a vision of the living God, who is the author of wonders innumerable, the greatest being, that wonder of wonders, that He loves us as dull as we are. This is what happened to Job. He had an encounter with God, and no longer did he think of God as a subject to fight about. He thought of Him as a sovereign Lord to fall before and worship. Samuel Terrien says, "Worship is not a power-tapping technique for feeling better. It is looking at the only marvel, God the creator of the world, and the re-creator who dwells in a broken and contrite heart. Job saw God as He really is, and as a result, he saw himself as he really was.

Verse 6.

Job says, as result of seeing God, he abhors himself. The idea here is that he blames himself for being so foolish. It is equivalent to our English expression, "I'm so mad at myself for saying that." One of the clearest signs with a real encounter with God is when a person looks back and wonders how he could be so blind. At any stage along the path of sanctification the believer can still have radical changes in his life, and sense a greater nearness to God. Some call this a second experience, but it is better not to stereotype it, but recognize that it can be a third, or fourth, or any number of times. God is infinite, and we are finite. We can never think we have exhausted His capacity to give greater vision.

We must also recognize that the more we know of God the more we marvel at His grace, for we become more sinful in the light of His holiness. Job repents when he sees God. Isaiah felt unclean when he saw the Lord. This is a common reaction all through the Bible. Job repents of all his boasting. He recognizes, in the presence of God, that he is not worthy of consideration. He justified himself before men, and he was right. God even says so in the next verse. He says

Job was right, and his friends were wrong. But the point is, when Job really caught a vision of the reality of God he could no longer justify himself. He could only repent for his presumption in speaking out on things beyond him.

We have not yet come to the happy ending, but even in this beginning of the end we have learned some basic truths. The greatest is that of our need to consistently grow in our knowledge of God. As He becomes greater to us, we become greater and more useful to the world. Encounter with the Living God helps us avoid the folly of much theological debate. It thrusts us into practical service and evangelism. Without this, God is not dead, but we are, and dead branches can bear no fruit. Only as we truly see the Living God can we bear witness to His glory and grace. Our constant prayer ought to be, "Lord increase our vision, and enlarge our concept of You." When this is achieved life will always have a happy ending.

