

How To Be A Friend

Job 2:11-13

INTRO:

A twelfth century saint said:

No medicine is more valuable, none more efficacious, none better suited to the cure of all our temporal ills than a friend to whom we may turn for consolation in a time of trouble—and with whom we may share our happiness in times of joy.

Job would have understood these words. I think we all understand them too, though perhaps to a lesser degree. If you've had a friend who could rejoice with you in your good fortune, or who stood by you in hard times, you know the wisdom of the saint's words. People like that bring **healing**. The kind of healing that if it could be bottled up and patented and sold, it would become quite a medical sensation.

Job's friends don't sound much like the ones described by the saint, **do they?**

ME:

When I am having a hard time and need to talk to someone about it, I mostly just need to talk and I mostly just need them to listen. It can be so

frustrating when the person shifts in to problem solving mode and starts giving advice that sometimes even sounds like commands.

YOU:

How about you? Do you like it when people listen with their mouths spilling out advice and judgment? Perhaps you like it better when people listen when you talk too. You know, when they are a good friend.

As we prepare to learn how to be a friend from the book of Job, let's pray together first...

GOD:

Job 2:11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. 13 They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

WE:

This morning we are going to think about how to be a friend in these dimensions.

I. Listen Much, Talk Little

It took some time, maybe months, for the news to get around and for the three friends of Job to show up on the scene. The friends arranged a meeting so they could join together to console Job.

When the friends get together near Job's house, they are cannot believe what they see. Like the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, Job is disfigured beyond recognition, at least from a distance. The friends had come to share **grief** and **console** Job. The same words are used in 42:11, where other members of his house perform this eastern ritual after Job is restored. To show grief literally means "**to shake the head.**" The three friends may have come mostly to go through the appropriate motions. But they were not at all ready for what they encountered.

The friends immediately went into a drastic form of mourning that was usually used only for a death or a total disaster. They tore their robes, they wailed, and they threw dust into the air.

Then they sat in silence before Job for seven days and nights.

Some think the seven days of silence a display of grief in its most intense form. Like the elders of fallen Jerusalem in [Lamentations 2:10](#), Job's friends sat on the ground with dust on their heads and kept silent. For one

of them to speak to the sufferer before the seven days was up would have been in bad taste.

Job's friends were at their best during those 7 days and nights when **“no one spoke a word to him.”** Maybe they were so wisely silent because they saw he was suffering so much. It is probably meaningful that they are said to have been silent for 7 days and night, because for the Hebrews, Seven was the number of completeness and perfection. This may be the Hebrew author's way of saying that they exercised restraint that was **“complete.”**

But then they became **unwise**. Yep, they started talking. And it all went downhill from there. They switched from focusing on Job's suffering to their own answers and explanations for his pain.

Most of the time when people come to us for help, they don't want our **ideas** or **solutions**, they want our **ears** and our **attention**.

They need the silence of compassion.

The first dimension of being a friend is to listen much and talk little.

The second dimension of being a friend is to:

II. Let God Be the Judge (Job 8:1-7)

Job 8:1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: 2 How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? 3 Does God pervert justice?

Or does the Almighty pervert the right? 4 If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression. 5 If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, 6 if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place. 7 Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.

Bildad was blunt. Eliphaz may only have offered a word earlier, but Bildad opened with a blast. “**Your words are blustering wind,**” said Bildad, as a preface to his one and only theological point:

Job’s suffering was the proof of his sinfulness.

Since God cannot be unjust, there is only one conclusion—Job and his family had received the punishment they deserved. Job should plead for mercy. Then, if he deserved it, God would restore him. Bildad failed to see that mercy implies the forgiveness one receives even though he does not deserve it. Eliphaz had appealed to **revelation**; Bildad appealed to **tradition**. To Bildad nothing less than the teachings of the ancients proved the truth of his viewpoint. If Job would only take the time to consider ancient tradition, he would find that God only does right. Sinners get just punishment, and good people are blessed with health and prosperity.

Have you ever noticed that when people let us into their lives, it is so easy to become judgmental?

Maybe not in so many words, but in **action** and in **fact**. That is why we start offering advice. From our view, we can see where adjustment is need-

ed. Think about it, this really means we've passed judgment on them. Bildad the Shuhite had plenty of advice for Job. He was sure Job was in the wrong. Maybe Bildad was trying to “**apologize**” for God. If so, *what nerve!* Apologizing for God is never necessary. By Bildad's own words we can see that he had passed judgement on Job. **Who knows?** People probably had been jealous of Job for a long time, *so he may have cherished the chance to offer advice to poor suffering Job!*

The second dimension of being a friend is to let God be the judge. The third dimension of being a friend is to:

III. Put Yourself in the Other Person Shoes

If we assume that Eliphaz has spoken for the others, Job dismisses them all as miserable comforters. They say that they are comforters who increase trouble instead of offering comfort. In the Hebrew phrase ‘**comforters of trouble**’ Job has picked out the word translated ‘**mischief**’ to throw back at Eliphaz. It is so easy to talk; but, Job asks, **how would they feel if they were in his place and he spoke like that?** Job is saying that, if their positions could be switched, he could do much better than they have done in the role of comforter.

We cannot do much better when a friend is in need than to painfully imagine how we would feel in the same situation. And think about it, there is no

better way to approach someone's hour of achievement than to imagine how we might feel under similar blessings.

Job was right when he said:

I also could talk as you do, if you where in my place.
(Job 16:4)

It is easy to come up with all the answers when it's the others person's shoes that pinch!

A truly good friend allows their own heart to enter into another's pain.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Good friends are people who care about us with wonderful unselfishness, so be a good friend!

YOU:

So, are you a good friend? If you think that you are, I hope you are not using Job's friends as your model! **What will you do when your friend is in pain and wants to talk to you about it?**

- **LISTEN MUCH, TALK LITTLE!**
- **LET GOD BE THE JUGDE!**
- **PUT YOURSELF IN THE OTHER PERSON'S SHOES!**

CLOSE:

Are your friends on Facebook actually your friends? According to an appeals court in Florida, "**legally, Facebook friends aren't necessarily your friends.**"

The court dove into this question because of a judge who may have been required to recuse herself from a case—because an attorney involved in that case was friends with the judge on Facebook. However, the court ruled that a recusal was not necessary, as "**Facebook data mining and algorithms lead to people accepting friend requests from people they hardly know or who they are only acquainted with in professional circles.**"

This issue isn't quite finished yet, though, as a Palm Beach appeals court ruled differently on the "**friend**" definition—meaning "**the question over the true meaning of social media friendship could eventually be decided by the Florida Supreme Court.**"

But we are not thinking about Facebook friendships this morning. We are thinking of friends with who we have actual, old school FaceTime with in life. People who can cry on our shoulders, or spit in our face as they rapidly tell of their sorrows. And we won't even wipe it off. They need us, and we are there for them in the moment.

Good friends are people who care about us with wonderful unselfishness, *so be a good friend! **Thank God for good friends!***

Let us pray...