

5 Things Job's Friends Teach Us About Being a True Friend

I've always been captivated by the friends of Job.

Do you remember Job, the man of suffering? He suffered the loss of everything.

Somewhere in the grief process his friends came, starting about chapter 2. They provide a bulk of the dialogue in the book.

We can learn a few things about how to be friends to those who are hurting from the friends of Job.

Here are five words to the friends of Job:

1. Thanks for showing up. Sometimes physical presence is the most comforting way to help someone grieve a loss. You came when it was uncomfortable to be a friend. That's when a true friend is found. You even sat with him—apparently not even eating—for seven days. Thank you. Your witness is well noted.

2. Speak truth. Don't say what everyone else is saying. Some in your culture believed that all suffering was the result of sin. We know that's not true about Job. You said some things that sounded good, some culturally acceptable things. But it's usually best not to provide commentary. Just say what is true. Nothing more. Sometimes that's only stuff like: "Wow! You're hurting. I'm sorry. I love you. I'm here for you!"

3. Not everything has to be explained. You had a lot of "ideas" why Job was suffering. Thanks for your insight. You just couldn't possibly understand all that God was allowing in Job's life nor could you predict his final outcome. Sometimes explanations are more burdensome than they are helpful in a time of grief.

4. Silence isn't deadly. Seriously. Sometimes silence is golden, even godly. Look at Ecclesiastes 5:2 for an example. You did that—before you started talking. The days you were silent were possibly as much help to Job as anything you did. It was your presence. Don't be afraid just to demonstrate your love with your presence more than with your words.

5. You help me better understand the Bible. The Bible is true, all of it, cover to cover. I believe that. I know that in the core of my being. Everything in the Bible is truth. But not everything in the Bible is true. It's truth in that it's God's written Word. It's not true unless God said it. Man talks in the Bible. So does the evil one. Some of the things you said weren't true. You meant well. But it's not truth unless it comes from God's mouth or it amplifies His truth.

So I learn from you, Job's friends. Thank you.

I must be present when my friends are hurting most. I must not try to explain everything. I must not think everything needs my input or my attempt at a solution. I must be OK with silence. I must not take what I've heard—or what's culturally acceptable—as an indication of truth. I must stick with the Scriptures and an accurate interpretation of them.

And when I don't know truth to share, I'll just be silent. And be present, fully present.

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