

Standing in the Need of Prayer

Job's friends are an example of how not to treat a friend in need. What can we learn from them about how to pray for those we love?

Those of you who know the story of Job, the righteous man God bragged about to Satan, will remember that God gave Satan license to afflict Job. Job lost his possessions and his health. His seven sons and three daughters, for whom he had interceded daily, pleading their cases before God as a defense attorney might plead their cases in court, were killed in a freakish windstorm (see Job 1:18-19).

His wife lost her confidence in the Lord and any respect she had for her husband. She eventually encouraged him to forget his integrity, to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9).

But one of the greatest losses to Job was the loss of relationships. Job's friends became a burden rather than a blessing. Those who should have been sensitive to his need and supportive in their actions during his time of trial only added to his burden. Interestingly, each of them represents a type of friend no one wants when going through trial.

Let's look at Job's friends. Perhaps in them we will learn the behaviors to avoid when our friends are suffering trials. We can develop an earnest desire to become effective prayer advocates when others have walked away.

Eliphaz, Job's Religious Friend

When Job needed loving, practical friends to assist and support him in his hour of need, his friend Eliphaz decided to be "superspiritual" instead. He took it upon himself to bring correction to Job:

“Job, I know you’re in a lot of pain right now, but I’d like to have a word with you. You’ve offered counsel and encouragement to lots of troubled people in the past. And you’ve been the first to support those who have stumbled.

“But now it’s obvious you’re discouraged regarding the trouble that has come to you. I know you think you’re a righteous man. But let me ask you a question: When have you ever heard of an innocent man being destroyed?” (adapted from Job 4:2-7).

Eliphaz was out of touch with the reality of Job’s intense suffering. The unsettling truth about friends who manifest the “I can hear God better than you” syndrome is that many of them have never personally experienced a genuine breaking from God. People with a religious spirit speak out of their soulishness and not from true brokenness.

Job didn’t need religion. He needed relationship. He needed a listening ear, not a sermon. Job needed an intercessor, not an instructor. Eliphaz thought he was serving God, when in fact he was an unknowing pawn of Satan. When called to the witness stand to defend Job, he became a star witness for the prosecution instead.

When we are suffering, may God deliver us from religious friends. Decide right now that when your friends are suffering, you will relate to them with compassion and empathy.

Bildad, Job’s Idealistic Friend

An idealist is defined as “one who adheres to philosophical theories of perfection and excellence and concepts of flawless morality.” This may sound good, but real life isn’t quite this pristine.

When suffering life’s trials, we need neither religious, holier-than-thou friends to scold us nor idealistic friends to rebuke us. Hearing Job’s explanation, Bildad replied: “Job, what you are saying about your situation is nothing but ‘hot

air.'

"God doesn't pervert justice. You know your children died because of their sin. So, I think it's high time that you plead with God for your own life. If you are the righteous man you think you are, He will restore your health and other losses. If history teaches us anything, it teaches us that God won't reject the righteous or bless the wicked" (adapted from Job 8:1-7).

Many Christians today have overlooked the powerful process of suffering and trials that God has designed to produce godliness in each of our lives. Let's not forget that Timothy says, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12, KJV).

If we overlook that process, when suffering befalls our friends, we are apt to assume it is God's judgment for sin. When trouble befalls us, we are apt to be totally confused (see 1 Pet. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 1:3-10; 2:9; James 1:2-4 for the purpose of suffering).

Sometimes God, for His own reasons, allows an idealistic friend to add to our test. At times we all need false and idealistic concepts to be broken. Perhaps through an idealistic friend we can see our blindness and resolve to fully surrender our hearts to God (see Ps. 51:17).

Zophar, Job's Legalistic Friend

A person who lives a life of legalism adheres to a literal and excessively religious moral code. The New Testament Pharisees were the legalists of their day. They monitored themselves and others by the Levitical law. Yet Jesus reprimanded them for neglecting "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23, NIV).

No doubt the whole spirit of their religion was summed up in self-righteousness, not in confession of sin or humility. This was the kind of friend Job had in Zophar, the legalist!

Zophar said: "How I wish God would tell you the truth about your situation, Job! He knows deceitful and evil men when He sees them. If you repent and put away your sin, then God will remove your shame" (adapted from Job 11:4-6,11,13-15).

With friends like these, who needs enemies? Apparently there was no one to plead the case for Job. His wife and friends all testified against him in court!

Let's not allow ourselves to become "Job's friends." When our friends are going through trials, let's not be a religious Eliphaz, an idealistic Bildad or a legalistic, know-it-all Zophar who is out of touch with his own pain. Let's agree to be spiritual defense attorneys, those who come alongside to bring carefully prayed-over and gently presented godly counsel, loving support and encouragement.

Defendant Becomes Defender

When God finished the work He was doing in Job, He promoted him from the role of suffering defendant to that of defense attorney once again. "After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as my servant Job has'" (Job 42:7). What a turnaround!

Job's friends had failed to defend him in his trial. They had criticized, mocked and accused him. His friends had not understood the process of trial. Under Satan's cross-examination in court they inadvertently served as witnesses for the prosecution. In so doing, they had even falsely accused God. Now the Court's judgment weighed heavily upon them. Judge Jehovah was about to pass sentence on them.

Then our merciful Judge gave Job's friends these surprising instructions: "So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your

folly. You have not spoken of Me what is right, as my servant Job has" (v. 8).

What was the result? "So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer" (v. 9).

Wow! The Judge gave Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar a court-appointed attorney—Job! As their attorney, Job was to plead their cases in prayer. And Job was no novice! Having defended his children and stood trial himself, Job the intercessor would not be praying detached, unfeeling, lifeless, ineffective prayers.

- He understood the pain and agony someone experiences when standing trial.
- He knew the fear, loneliness and severity of facing trial without a godly support team.
- He would represent his friends well before the Judge of heaven.

Friend, the trials you have suffered, when understood in the context of God's overall purposes and properly applied, can be used to a kingdom advantage as you intercede for others who are standing trial today. For Job's friends, the best part was that their victory was guaranteed before their case even came to trial!

That's ! Judge Jehovah said to Job's wayward friends, "I will accept his [Job's] prayer and not deal with you according to your folly."

Job Passes the Test

As long as Job remained the self-absorbed defendant, primarily concerned with his own need, he was a victim. It was only when he became a God-conscious, God-ordained, anointed defender of others that he experienced his own victory! "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends"

(Job 42:10, KJV).

Yes, Job's captivity was turned when he prayed for his friends. When Job focused on God and others, his own captivity was turned! This is what Jesus taught us to do when He gave us the two greatest commandments: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-31).

Are you currently enrolled in "the school of suffering?" Perhaps you have been experiencing some Job-like trials of your own. When will they end?

That's really the wrong question. The question we should ask is, "What will they produce?" And that, friend, is largely up to you. If you are facing trial today, look for another person who needs a good defense attorney and become that person's advocate before the throne of God in prayer.

It could be that your captivity, like Job's, will be turned as you pray for your friends! Immerse yourself in their victory, and you will likely discover your own! "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12). May this also be said of you!

Eddie Smith is co-founder and president of the U.S. Prayer Center, and his wife, **Alice Smith**, is executive director. They are both internationally known conference speakers and authors.