



TIME OF GRACE®

Seriously, God? How Am I Supposed to Comfort Others?

Study Notes

Summary

Job's friends comfort him in his grief . . . for a while. As time goes on, however, their presence turns sour and an epic argument begins about Job's life and God's plans. This message forces us to reflect on what we say (and don't say) when suffering takes over our story.

- **Job 2:11** — ¹¹When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.
- After tragedy, community is _____.
- **Job 2:12,13** — ¹²When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. ¹³Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.
- After tragedy, community is _____.

"We will all grieve differently and for different lengths of time. However, there are two things in common to all: We cannot do this alone, and above all, we cannot do this without God."

Points to Ponder

1. Google the lyrics for the song, *It Is Well*. Which verses/phrases are the most powerful for you? If you were Job's friend, which lines do you think would have brought him comfort?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. What do these famous verses have to do with suffering? How do they apply to your life today?
3. Meditate on Job 2:11-13. If you had to give Job's friends a letter grade based on their friendship, what grade would you give them? Explain your answer.
4. Evaluate: Generous people tend to have the community they need to get through their next tragedy.
5. Do you know someone who is wondering why life is so hard? "Why does God let us suffer?" is the key question we will answer in next week's message. Invite a friend who needs this specific truth in their life.

Homework for Next Week

Read Job chapters 4-37

Time of Grace Ministry
Seriously, God? How Am I Supposed to Comfort Others?
Job 2:11-13
October 16, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

If you're hurting you know just how hard it can be to see the path forward. Pain has a way of clouding our vision and making us feel alone and isolated and even hopeless. And in those moments the Devil whispers in our ear, doesn't he? He asks us, "Well, if God's so powerful and if God is so present then why doesn't he fix it? Why doesn't he end your chronic pain, why doesn't he cure your family, why doesn't he resolve your situation? Maybe, just maybe, God doesn't love you."

What do you personally do in those moments when pain washes over you like a tidal wave? Well, those are the very questions I try to answer in this brand-new book called "When Life Hurts." It's a real raw dive into the Old Testament Book of Job, where we find God's shocking and beautiful answer to our pain. Does God love us? Yes. Because of Jesus he has to. If Jesus gave his life on the cross for you then he must love you, even when you don't see or understand the ways of God. So, when we hurt and when you hurt, fix your eyes on Jesus.

I hear that all the time. "You know, Pastor, 15 years ago I went through this, but my pastor at the time just showed up, like, every week he called." And no one remembers what he says, but he was there, right? So, I want to encourage you today. This is not just a sermon you hear and say, "That was nice. I'm going to fill in the blanks now." Like, God is telling you, "Go. Go, go, go. They need you."

You know, one of the really cool, really amazing, and really humbling parts of what we do is that people tend to come to us, to the church, and to pastors, normally, when times are really, really good or when they're really, really, not. Alright, like, "We conceived, we're going to have a baby, we're going to start a family. Let's tell the pastor, let's pray about that." Or when we can't have kids, when we lost the baby, when there's been a miscarriage, people tell the pastors about that. When a relationship has gone from "This is something special" to, like, "This is the thing. Can we have a wedding? Would you speak?" people call the pastor. Or when things really get bad and someone drops the D-word, and there's maybe a separation, a divorce, they call the pastor. When there's some celebration, they call the pastor. When it's cancer, they call the pastor. We get to ride the rollercoaster with you on the ups and downs of life. And so, I wanted to ask these guys, when it's not the ups but the downs, what do you do, right? I'm the guy who's pretty good at the ups, the Bible passages about joy, it's just how I'm wired. I'll quote "Dumb and Dumber" or "Anchorman," we'll have a good time together, but like, when it gets here, I kind of feel emotionally incompetent, what do you say? You know, a person is just empty. They've lost a child, the closest person they loved is gone, they're going back to that bed to sleep in it all alone.

God has plans, and someone might lash out, and say, "What kind of God is this that would have plans to make me feel like that? If I'm his child, why would he let that happen?" You could try to share your story, and someone could throw that back, like, "You don't know what I'm going through. You did that, but this is so much worse."

I've kind of realized after 40 years of life and 14 years of being a pastor, that it's complicated, and it's messy, and there's no perfect script. There's no page in the Bible that says, "Step one, say this. Step two, do that," and so there's this tension, isn't there? Like, all of us end up in these conversations with people who are feeling incredible pain. All of us want to do something good and helpful, and very few of us know exactly what that helpful thing to do is, and that's why I'm excited to preach to you today. Next week, I'm going to try to cover 35 chapters of the Book of Job in one sermon. Bring extra coffee, cancel plans after church. Today though, I'm not going to preach 35 chapters, I'm not even going to preach one chapter or half a chapter, I'm going to just preach on three little verses from the end of Job 2, because this tension that we feel today, it's not the first time.

Many, many years ago, there was this guy named Job. His life went from good to bad to unthinkable bad, and at the very end of Job 2, his friends show up, and they try to deal with the situation that we all deal with. Like, they're good friends, they care about Job. What will they do? What will they say? Today, we're going to take a peek at what these friends did and we're going to think about what we can do for each other when moments like this turn into moments like that. So, if you have a Bible or a phone in your hand, you can open up to Job 2, otherwise you can follow along on the screen because we're going to begin today with Job 2:11, which says this: "When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite." Sweet names, aren't they? Anyone pregnant here today? You need some baby names? Write that down.

"Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, when they heard about all the troubles that had come upon Job, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him." These are ride or die, stand up next to at your wedding, carry the casket at your funeral kind of friends. That they care so much about Job, the text says, "They met together by agreement," right? It's like, "We got to do something. What are we going to do? I don't know. Let's get together, let's brainstorm, let's come up with some plan because Job is at the bottom, and he needs us right now." Job didn't invite them, he didn't say, "You guys got to come," they just knew, because this is what great friends do. Job needed help. And according to the same verse, when they met together by agreement, they came up with three goals. You see that in the text?

First of all, their goal was to go, goal number two was to sympathize, and goal number three was to comfort. Alright, they said, "We got to go," right? I mean, sometimes sending a text, Snapchat message, writing a letter, FaceTime video, sometimes that works, but sometimes, you just got to go. Sometimes you're close enough to that person and the relationship is there where you just physically have to be at the funeral. A digital hug is nice, an actual hug is about a thousand times better. "We got to go," they said.

Number two, they said, "We got to go because we need to sympathize with Job." Now, the Hebrew word used here for sympathize literally means to do this, to move to and fro. It's like when someone shares terrible news with you, you just instinctively -- your heart shakes your head, like, "No. Aww man." They said, "We got to show Job that this is so bad, this is not the way that life is supposed to be. We want to sympathize with him, we want to mirror his emotions."

And then finally, number three, they said, "We want to go to comfort him." Like his comfort level went from here to here, and then to here, and they couldn't bring back Job's deceased children, they couldn't cure all of his illnesses. But somehow, they wanted to say something or do something to make him just 1% more comfortable. "Let's go, let's sympathize, let's comfort him." Those were the three goals of these three incredible friends.

It makes me think of some of my friends. About a month ago, I was at a middle school volleyball game, and one of my classmates who's a pastor here in our town said, "Did you hear about Nate?" I had no clue, but I found out that one of our classmates, 40 years old, a pastor over in Kansas, he actually died of Covid. Forty, just like that, gone. Married not that long ago, four kids, ages 7 and under. And I can't imagine his wife waking up every day with four kids needing attention.

And then I heard what some of his friends did. Nate was blessed with a lot of friends. I was maybe in his second circle. But his inner circle, the guys he had known long before he met me, that he went to high school and college and seminary with, they did exactly what Job's friends did. They met together digitally, they said, "What are we going to do?" And they said, "We got to go." It's like pastors leaving behind churches, and families, and children, and jobs as they took personal time off, they piled into a couple of cars in Wisconsin, they drove 600 miles over to Kansas, just to go, and to sympathize, and to comfort. They hugged the recent widow; they spoke words of grace and Jesus to these little kids. They actually formed a choir, and they stood up, and they sang about God's glory, and the beauty of heaven at this man's funeral. They couldn't fix it, they couldn't bring Nate back, but they were friends, and this is what friends do. They physically go, they emotionally sympathize, and they verbally comfort.

So, let me ask you. Is there someone in your life right now who needs you to do the same thing? I'm choosing that word carefully, like, "needs." Every week, in my planning journal, I write myself a question. "Mike, who needs a pastor?" Sometimes a pastor's nice. "Hey, let's catch up, let's grab some coffee. Would you pray for me? Could you answer this question about the Bible?" Sometimes that's nice, but sometimes, you just need it. Like, as bad as life has been in a long time.

So, let me ask you that question. Who needs you right now? If I gave you five seconds of silence, could you think of a friend, a family member, a neighbor, who's maybe dealing with one of the killer D's? Disease, death, divorce, or depression? Here's the deal. They need you. They might not have the words to tell you, they might be embarrassed to ask you, but when people hit bottom, when humans hit bottom, they need you. Do you know what Jesus himself said, God in

human flesh, the night before he died? He went to a garden to pray, and he said to his friends, "Stay with me. Like, I'm so overwhelmed with sorrow." Jesus said, "Stay. I need you."

And your friends need you too, right? You might not know how to fix it, you might not know which things on the list, your plan might not be perfect, but they need you. So, I want to urge you, I want to pastorally push you, just go. Just show up. Bring a casserole, send a text, give them a heads up. I might be messy, it might be imperfect, but the fact is we need each other in moments like that. "How good and pleasant it is," the Bible says, "when people live together in unity. If one person lies down alone, how sad, but where two are there together, how good." Ecclesiastes 4 says that.

So, brainstorm with a couple of friends, meet together by agreement, come up with your own plan to go, to sympathize, and to comfort, because here is what I have learned. These are the moments in life that people remember. When we are just, like -- husband left, dad died, baby's lost, breakup, got fired, mental illness -- when people just show up. That's the stuff that sticks with us, doesn't it? People don't remember what you cooked, they probably won't remember what Bible passage you quoted, but the fact that you were there when they just needed someone to be there. I hear that all the time. "You know, Pastor, 15 years ago I went through this, but my pastor at the time just showed up, like, every week he called." And no one remembers what he says, but he was there, right? So, I want to encourage you today. This is not just a sermon you hear and say, "That was nice. I'm going to fill in the blanks now." God is telling you, "Go. Go, go, go. They need you."

Here's my big idea if you're taking notes. After tragedy, community is a necessity. After tragedy, community is a necessity. It's not nice, it's what we need, just like Jesus. Verse 12: "When they, the three friends, saw Job from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."

I actually was reading some Bible commentaries on this chapter, and one pastor has actually read through the Book of Job, and he had highlighted every physical thing that Job was dealing with, and I never knew this. I want to share with you his list. He said that Job's suffering included, "Inflamed ulcerous sores, persistent itching, disfiguration, loss of appetite." Here's my favorite, "Worm infested skin that burst open, scabbed over, cracked, oozed, and pussied, difficulty breathing, foul breath, loss of weight, high fever, chills, diarrhea, depression, anxiety, and excruciating continual pain." That's what they saw, and they couldn't say a word, they didn't even recognize him. Like, "Where's Job?" And a neighbor must have said, "You just saw him." And so, they tear their robes like Job tore his, they sprinkled dust on their head, like Job shaved his own head, and they just sit down on the ground for seven days. They don't go back home, they don't get a nice hotel room, they just sit with their friend for seven straight days.

And what do they do? The text says, "No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was." What do you think about that? Let me give you a quiz. You won't be graded; the cameras aren't recording you. Do you think the fact that Job's closest friends didn't say a word for

seven days, do you think that was a good way to help their hurting friend or a bad way to help their hurting friend? You got to vote on three, ready? Got to pick one. One, two, three. I see goods, I see a couple bads. I'm like this. I mean, some people think this is good. In fact, In Jewish culture, when to this day you walk into the home of someone who is suffering, you don't speak first. You don't impose your conversation upon them, you wait for them to speak and you see where they're at, right? And the fact that Job had lost -- I mean, when ten of your children, all of your children are gone, what exactly do you say? God has a plan for you? No, it's brilliant that they just sat there, and they just were with him.

And if you know about the 35 chapters that are about to come in the Book of Job, once these men open their mouth, it all goes off the tracks, right? They start trying to explain why this would happen. They start to say, "Maybe Job, you're not as good as everyone thought." The conversation explodes into the longest argument between four men that you're ever read in the Bible and in your entire life. So maybe the best thing these guys could do was just shh! Just weep, just sit on the ground with this broken man.

But other people, including some pretty great theologians and Bible commentators, they say, "Imagine if you were Job." Like, if you were in some car wreck, everyone that you loved in the car was gone, you were hooked up to tubes, and I came to see you in the hospital. And I saw you there, and you saw me, and I just wept, and I sat down, and I held your hand. If I did that for an hour, you'd be like, "What a pastor." If I did that for a day, you'd be like, "His hand is kind of sweaty." If I sat by your side for a week, and didn't say a word, would that be awkward? You're thinking, "Well, say something. What are you thinking?" And so, there's this great debate. Is this the best thing the friends ever did? Or is this the most awkward, insensitive things the friends ever did? And I actually love the fact that there's some ambiguity here because here's the second big idea I want to share with you today, write this down.

That after tragedy, community is messy, right? It just is. When people are hurting, when we walk into a conversation that is filled with pain, it's not clear-cut, it's not black and white, it is so, so messy. Do you walk into the room and say something? Maybe. Do you stick around because she's going to need so much help after the death of the one she loved? Maybe. Does she want some space from you and some privacy to mourn? Maybe. Do you ask a question like, "Hey, if you need any help, text me, okay?" Maybe. Is asking a person, who just can't think straight right now, to come up with a list of things for you to do the right thing to do? Maybe. Do you open a Bible and just share your own story and testimony? Maybe. Do you remind a person that God is powerful and he's going to work this for their good, just like the Bible says? Maybe. Will someone be mad at God in that moment? Maybe. When someone, in their pain, says something about God that's not biblically true, when they question his love and his plans, do you become the theologian hawk? You know, swoop in and correct them so the lie doesn't grow in their hearts? Maybe. Do you just understand that hurt people say things they don't mean? Probably. Like what do you do?

And the Bible's answer is you try. It's messy. After tragedy, community is a necessity, we need people, but the reality is community is also messy, those people are going to walk in the room and it's not going to be perfect. I told some of you a few weeks ago, that just after I was born,

my parents had another child. The child, Jimmy, was sick, he died at just six weeks old. My mom called the pastor, and the pastor's wife picked up, and do you know the first thing she said to my mom? "Praise Jesus!" Wrong answer. There's a time to praise Jesus but there is just a time to not speak. She messed up because she is a person, and people are going to mess up, they're going to disappoint you. You're going to wish that they would show up, and they didn't. You're going to wish that they would just give you some space, and they won't. You're going to wish they would stop blowing up your phone because you just need -- you need silence. You're going to wish, as you stare at your phone, that someone would reach out, and they won't.

It's like they can't read hearts, they can't read minds, but just know this. It is infinitely better to go through pain with messy friends than with no friends at all, alright? So, don't let the devil dupe you, don't hold it against them and let that seed of bitterness take root. Don't replay the conversation and just punish them again and again. If you have to talk to them about it, talk to them, and then extend to them the same forgiveness and grace that God has extended to you, right? That's the beauty about being a Christian. We have received so much forgiveness from Jesus. Those of us who are aware of our sins, we realize if Jesus gave us a 10,000th chance, we'd still need more. And yet he forgives, and he forgives, and he forgives, and he forgives, and that's so good for us, and it prepares us to extend that forgiveness for them. So, thank God that they showed up, forgive them for their sins, and don't let the devil mess with the community that is a necessity after our tragedy.

So, final question. What are you going to do? It's going to land in different spots for all of us, but who's the person? What's the step? What's the forgiveness you need to embrace or to extend, the message you need to send or to receive? Here's what I'm super grateful for. In this broken world, you and I are not alone, and the stronger our roots get here, like I know you can believe in Jesus all by yourself, but how good is it when the bottom falls off, you have this, you have a church, a pastor, a group, friends who know God, love God, and love you? That's how we get through it together.

That's what Mike told me. Mike is a member of our church who leads a local chapter of a program called "Grief Share." It's usually a small group for people who have lost those that they dearly love. I knew Mike had infinite more experience than I did in this area, so I asked him this simple question via email, I said, "Mike, does community really make a difference? He responded, "Pastor Mike, we will all grieve differently and for different lengths of time. However, there are two things in common to all: we cannot do this alone, and above all, we cannot do this without God." So brothers and sisters, those of you on the highs and lows, expect it to be messy, and thank God for Jesus. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for grace. I'm rethinking all those conversations with the amazing people at our church wondering what I could have done better, what I should have said, what I shouldn't have said. Thank you that we can think about those conversations without ending up with so much shame and guilt that it just keeps us up. Thank you, Jesus, that when you went to the cross, you said, "It is finished," and you thought of all of it. All the sins, and in the highest highs and lowest lows, you paid for all of them. We are so grateful for your unfailing love.

Now Heavenly Father, I'm asking for your Spirit, for all of us. Some of us are going to take some huge steps, some momentous moments in the days to come, and we need your Spirit to guide us and give us wisdom. Father, you said in the Book of James that if any of us lacks wisdom, if we just don't know what to do, we should ask you and not doubt, and you will give it abundantly and generously, so we're praying big today, God, make us brilliant at this. Like, if a thought comes into our mind, and it's not beneficial, put a lump in our throat so we can't speak. If a Bible passage we haven't thought of in forever is perfect for that moment, bring it to our memory, to our hearts, that we could speak and not just sympathize, but bring comfort through your word.

Finally Jesus, we pray for patience. The Bible says that the only reason you haven't come back yet to end this brokenness is because you love people who are not here just yet, people who still have doubts, people who question you, people who don't believe that you died for the forgiveness of their sins. They matter so much to you, God, that you're still waiting, and so we pray for patience.

Help us to love each other well, to serve each other well in the moments until you come back, when there is no more mourning, and no more crying, and no more death, and no more divorce, and no more depression, the brokenness will be gone, the old ways will be passed, and the new will come. We ache for that day, and we know that you're going to get us there, so inspire us God, forgive us, and lead us as we race to the finish line where we see your face and pain is gone forever. We pray this all with confidence because of your glorious Son, and all God's people said "Amen.