

## **“You’ve Got a Friend in Me”**

Job 2:11-13

During his days as president, it is said that Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river which had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. The very real possibility of death threatened each rider, which caused a traveler who was not part of their group to step aside and watch. After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The president agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, “Tell me, why did you select the president to ask this favor of?” The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the president who had helped him. “All I know,” he said, “Is that on some of your faces was written the answer ‘No,’ and on some of them was the answer ‘yes.’ His was a ‘Yes’ face.”

That’s a pretty good description of what it means to be a friend. A friend is someone with a ‘Yes’ face.

In our day, we are in desperate need of a refresher course on what it means to be a friend. Our is the day where social media has made it easy to be a ‘friend,’ where all you have to do is send someone a request or like their status. We need a better definition of what it means to be a friend than the one Facebook provides.

A British newspaper once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers received were the following:

- “One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable.”
- “One who understands our silence.”
- “A volume of sympathy bound in cloth.”
- The winning definition read: “A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.”

The word “friend” appears in verse 11. The Hebrew word for ‘friend’ that is used in the Old Testament, and especially in the Wisdom literature, is a much stronger word than our modern superficial connotation.

To be a friend in the true biblical sense is to be bound to someone with steadfast love in an unbreakable, covenant sense.

**Proverbs 17:17 - “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”**

**Proverbs 18:24 - “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”**

In life you will have many companions, but very few real friends. The secret to having true friends is being a true friend.

At the end of chapter 2, we are introduced to Job’s three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Namaathite. These three men have secured their place in history as friends trying to provide comfort to a man in misery, but only adding to his grief. However, not all that we read about Job’s friends is bad. In fact, there is some good mentioned about them in this text. When it came to being a friend, they had the best of intentions, but they ultimately fell short.

I want to focus in on what is said about Job’s three friends here in verses 11-13, and I want us to learn from their example about how as well as how not to assist someone who is hurting.

### **1. Their AVAILABILITY (2:11)**

*“Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place...They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him.”*

Our last picture of Job is one in which he has lost everything—his wealth, livelihood, and his children. Satan had launched an all out assault on Job in an attempt to get him to renounce his faith. When taking his possessions and murdering his family didn’t work, Satan turns to plan B and attacks Job’s health. He strikes Job with loathsome sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. The only relief that Job can get comes in the form of a broken piece of pottery that he uses to scrape his blistered body.

When Job's friends hear of the calamity that had come upon him, they each came from their own place.

**“Appointment”** - *strong show of unity and solidarity*

In other words, they dropped what they were doing and came to be with their friend in his time of crisis. They made themselves available to him in the midst of his pain and grief. They want to come to him and show him that they care. These three men come with noble intentions. They want to comfort and console Job in his time of suffering in an attempt to ease his pain.

**“Sympathy”** - *word means to show compassion; to enter into and share one's grief*

**“Comfort”** - *to ease one's pain; to sigh with*

Job's friends are not fair-weather friends who only show up when it is to their own advantage. They are not name-droppers who claim to be his friends just so they have access to his beach condo. As far as we can tell, these were loyal friends who took considerable trouble to travel and come to be with Job when he was bankrupt and grief stricken. Out of sincerity, they make themselves available to Job.

Someone has well said that the best ability is availability.

Every single person in the church qualifies to be an expert when it comes to assisting those who are hurting. You don't have to be brilliant, articulate, or experienced. Nor do you have to possess a degree. The only thing you have to be to help someone in need is to be available.

To be available means to be present and ready for use.

Those who make themselves available have a “you” before “me” kind of attitude. Such individuals are selfless rather than selfish. They think of others before they think of themselves.

We often miss out on a lot of ministry because we are so inwardly focused. Job's friends are putting Job's needs above their own. He had been a friend for years and was now in a time of personal crisis.

How to make yourself available:

- spend time with God first and foremost

- think of others before you think of yourself
- let people know that you care

## 2. Their ACTIONS (2:12-13)

*“And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. And 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.”*

The most devastating attack on Job’s faith doesn’t come through his physical trials, as painful as they have been. No, the most intense attacks will come on his spiritual walk with God, and ironically, these attacks will come through his well-meaning and misguided friends.

According to what the Bible says, these three men traveled a great distance to be with Job, so a certain amount of time must have elapsed while Job was suffering. It took time for word to get out.

Probably weeks, if not months, passed while Job was undergoing his trials. When his friends finally arrive, they are horrified at the sight of this once great man. They are astonished to find that he has become a repulsive sight to behold. The man whom they used to admire and hold in highest esteem was sitting in the city garbage dump scraping his bloodied body with a broken piece of pottery.

Verse 12 indicates that he was unrecognizable.

**“Recognize”** - *word implies that it was not so much that these men doubted it was Job but that this man sitting on the ash heap did not look anything like the Job they knew so well*

Notice how they respond:

- To begin with, the Bible says that they raised their voices and wept

The idea is that they wailed at the sight of their friend. They are brokenhearted when they see Job’s agony and what he had become.

- Next, they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads.

To cover one's head with dust was a symbolic gesture that spoke of mortality, frailty, and death.

**Genesis 3:19 - "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."**

- Last, they sat with him in silence

Sometimes, the best thing you can do for someone who is hurting is to sit with them on the ash heap. You don't have to say a word. You can minister to someone with just your simple presence.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Actions speak louder than words?"

Job's friends sit with him on the ash heap and say nothing for seven days and seven nights. Had they simply remained silent, it would have been to their advantage. In chapter 4, they begin to sermonize.

I think it is important to note how these three friends were well intentioned. One writer points out four ways that they got it right:

- they join Job in his grief
- they show respect for his grief
- they allow Job to be the first one to speak
- they earn the right to speak by faithful presence

**3. Their ASSUMPTIONS (13:4-5)**

*"As for you, you whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are you all. Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom!"*

All three of Job's friends will take their turn at trying to advise Job in the midst of his pain. Granted, much of what they say is true. However, it doesn't apply to Job. Their arguments are based on the assumption that Job has sinned in some way, and therefore he is suffering the way that he is.

Job's friends will argue that suffering is punishment for sin and prosperity is reward for righteousness (4:7-8). Eliphaz admits in 5:17 that some suffering was chastisement and could be good for us, but it becomes clear that for him this is the exception, not the rule, and that

protracted suffering like Job's could not be explained this way. So he winds up saying to Job, "Is not your wickedness great!" (22:5).

In other words, Job's extraordinary suffering can only be explained as the punishment of God for grievous sin.

Job defends himself by saying, contrary to his three friends' opinion, that there is good evidence from all over the world that the wicked often prosper and the righteous often suffer (21:29–30). And in his case in particular he was not an enemy of God, nor had he committed any grievous sin that would set him up for such suffering above others.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are not able to sustain their theory in the face of Job's integrity. Their speeches become repetitive, hostile, and shorter as the conversation comes to a close. Finally, only Job was left speaking. Job's friends make the wrong assumptions.

Job needed a sympathetic friend, not an accusatory critic. We are often afraid to get down on the ash heap with someone because in our minds, we are afraid that we will become complicit in whatever sin has resulted in them being in such a condition.

There is a difference in being a friend to sinners and friendship with the world. When the Bible refers to friendship with the world, it is referring to an alliance with and a participation in unbiblical, antichristic ideas. It is following the opinions of culture rather than submitting to the truth of God's Word.

Jesus was accused of being a friend of sinners.

**Matthew 11:18-19 - "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look at Him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."**

Jesus demonstrated He is a friend of sinners:

- He welcomed little children that other people thought were a nuisance and a distraction
- He stopped ministry to the crowds to minister to the one
- He embraced those who were sick and had physical sicknesses such as leprosy

- He stood between a crowd of self-righteous Pharisees and a woman who had been caught in adultery
- His disciples were common men, and the Scripture says in Mark 12:37 that the common man heard Him gladly

We pattern our lives after the life of Jesus, and if He is the friend of sinners, then shouldn't we be friends to sinners? It is hard to be the friend of a sinner when you are devoted to being their judge, jury, and executioner.

Instead, a true friend is someone who:

- loves no matter what
- shows up no matter where
- helps no matter why

Job needed a sympathetic friend, and he was innocent. He hadn't sinned in some way against God, and as a result, was receiving his just desserts. And yet his friends make these accusations.

Chuck Swindoll tells a very moving story about the late Joe Bayly and his wife, Mary Lou, who lost three of their children. They lost one son following surgery when he was only eighteen days old. They lost the second boy at age five because of leukemia. They lost the third son when he was 18 after a sledding accident. Joe wrote of his experiences with suffering in his book, *The View from a Hearse*:

**Joe Bayly** - *"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, he said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except I wished he'd go away. He finally did. Another came and sat beside me. He didn't talk. He didn't ask leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go."*

When it comes to Job's friends, their involvement is a sign of true concern. Their intention is to bring comfort, and we commend them for it. However, their insensitivity is something worth considering, especially as it relates to the way we respond to hurting people.

Here are three application points to remember when it comes to ministering to hurting people:

- They need **our presence** more than our words

**Warren Wiersbe** - *“The best way to help people who are hurting is to just be with them saying little to nothing, and letting them know you care. Don’t try to explain everything; explanations never heal a broken heart. If his friends had listened to him, accepted his feelings, and not argued with him, they would have helped him greatly; but they chose to be prosecuting attorneys instead of witnesses.”*

- They need **our help** more than our advice

**James 2:15-17** - **“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving the things needed for the body, what good is that?”**

- They need **our Savior** more than our sermons

Make yourself available to hurting people. Do what you can to assist hurting people. Most important of all, show people the compassion of Jesus Christ. Love people in the midst of their pain and sorrows. Let them see Jesus in you, and then in time perhaps even your words will become helpful.

You will be amazed at the opportunities you will be afforded to share the gospel of Jesus when you begin by showing people the love of Jesus, no strings attached.

Though His death on the cross, He became the bearer of our sins as the One who suffered in our place on the ash heap outside the city gate. He is our Great Physician who heals our sin sickness, our Great High Priest who identifies with our weaknesses, and our Friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Jesus was forsaken on the cross so that through repentance and faith in His death and resurrection, you can be accepted and forgiven by God and given new life.

Joseph M. Scriven was an Irish clergyman who was born in 1819 and died in 1896. When he was 25 years old, he was in love and to be married. The day before his wedding his fiancée died in a tragic drowning accident. Heartbroken, Joseph sailed from his home in Ireland to start a new life in Canada. While in Canada working as a teacher, he fell in love again and became

engaged to Eliza Roche, a relative of one of his students. Once again, Joseph's hopes and dreams were shattered when Eliza became ill and died before the wedding could take place. Soon after her death, he joined the Plymouth Brethren and even later became the pastor of a Baptist church. He never married, but spent the remainder of his life giving all his time, money and even the clothes off his own back to help the less fortunate and to spread the love and compassion of Jesus wherever he went.

Around the same time that Eliza died, Joseph received word from Ireland that his mother was ill. He could not go to be with her, and you can imagine the pain he felt in his life. He had lost two fiancées, and now his own mother. So he sat down and wrote a letter of comfort to his mother, and he enclosed one of his poems.

The poem that he wrote was later put to music, and reads as follows:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge—  
Take it to the Lord in prayer;*

*Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?*

*Take it to the Lord in prayer;*

*In His arms He'll take and shield thee,*

*Thou wilt find a solace there.*