

Miserable Counselors

Job 16:2

CONTEXT: Last week we leaned into the text and we listened and learned from Job - a man loved by God, a man of whom God boasted. We saw three questions that Job asked God in the Midst of his suffering.

Today we are going to look at the text from a different angle. Job had three friends... although at times you wonder *if they deserved the title of friend*. The fact is, there is much we can learn from these three men about how NOT to comfort, and how NOT to counsel.

Probably, each one of us knows someone who is going a trial and we are in the place of the friend... let's learn how to counsel and comfort well.

TEXT: Job 2:11 (ESV)

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him.

JOKE - For many years it was believed that **Zaccheaus** was the shortest man in the bible. But then some scholars suggested it was **Knee high miah**. But the best scholarship tells us that it was in fact **Bildad the Shoe Height**. Someone raised a debate last week that it could have been Peter because he slept on his watch.

Most of the book of Job is taken up with the counsel given to Job by these three friends.

They did some things well:

1. **They were there** - The ministry of being there is one of the most important ministries in the church. Sometimes, just to show up is the best thing you can do.

ILLUSTRATION: When I first became Pastor of this church I was suddenly thrown into a situation that seminary doesn't prepare you for. A lady in our church was suffering inoperable brain cancer. She was a mom of 3 children. My first week on the job she was nearing the end. I went out to the house and really didn't know what to say. I sat there and talked to them, prayed with them... but in all honesty felt like I had really let them down. A few weeks after the funeral her husband came to see me. He said, "I don't know how we would have made it through if you hadn't of been there". I said, well I'm so sorry I wasn't better equipped to know what to say. He said, "Yeah, you didn't really know what to say did you... but you were there".

Job's friends were there.

FRIENDSHIP - Several years ago there was a contest in Great Britain where people were asked to give their definition of true friendship. The winning submission was this - ***A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.***

They were there in his darkest hour.... but not only that...

2. **They were quiet** - For a solid week that obeyed the biblical command to, "weep with those who weep". Oh what a ministry that was.

Did you know in the Old Testament there were times when they would hire professional mourners to come and weep over lost loved ones. But not Job - he had his friends to weep with him.

3. **They didn't gossip** - We have to realize that even though they said a lot of things that should not have been said, ***they said it to Job***. They talked TO HIM, rather than ABOUT HIM.

There is nothing more damaging to community than gossip. These friends were miserable counselors... but because they spoke to Job, by the end of the book everything was resolved and all minds were at peace.

I'm of the firm conviction that things would have been 10X worse if they had gossiped.

4. **They let Job vent** - In chapter 3, they let Job vent his frustration, vent his anger, vent his confusion. And to be perfectly honest - ***I would imagine that the Holy Spirit preserved a sanitized version of what Job said***. I've been there when a soul has been crushed. The language is often not sanitized, but it's real.

ILLUSTRATION: I had a friend who got to the end of his rope and made some horrible decisions. For several days he would return my calls, he didn't want to talk. When I finally got to talk to him for the first hour he just vented... to be honest I was embarrassed at some of the things I heard. But I let him vent... the first couple of conversations I had with him was just him venting to me... then about the third call he said, "I just want to thank you for letting me get some of that out, I'm embarrassed at some of the things I said, but I know you understand".

When someone had just been crushed - you just need to **lance the wound** and let the infection out. Job's friends did that.

They had one really good week for that they are to be commended...But they only had one really good week. What follows it a case study in how not to counsel.

Eventually Job is driven to say in Job 16:2 (ESV)

² "I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all.

What did Elephaz, Bildad, and Zophar do that was so bad? 3 things.

1. They Over Simplified

Eliphaz speaks....Job 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?

⁸ As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

He is saying - that this doesn't happen to innocent people. If you are reaping trouble you must have sown it. So, figure it out and change... this is a very pragmatic approach to suffering.

It's cause and effect. It's a moral law like gravity. You must have brought this on yourself.

Now that is true sometimes - Paul even said in **Galatians 6:7–8 (ESV)**

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

So generally it is true that you reap what you sow - but that is not to say that every catastrophe is a direct correlation to some sin you committed.

LIFE IS OFTEN MORE COMPLEX THAN PAT ANSWERS.

ILLUSTRATION: In **1 Kings 19** the Prophet Elijah is in deep depression... then the Angel of the Lord shows up. Now what do you think this angel of God will say? Nothing... he cooks him a meal and lets him go to sleep... then he wakes him up and cooks for him again.

NOW - if we were just spiritual beings it might be appropriate to get out a list as ask 1000 questions. Have you confessed, repents, claimed the promises, etc?

But we are not JUST Spiritual - we are also **physical**... sometimes what a person needs is a nap... a walk in the woods... a good meal.

We are not JUST Spiritual - we are also **relational**... sometimes what a person needs is a hug. Did you know that often times the best thing I can give my wife is not a verse... it's a hug.

Tim Keller -

- **Religious** people tend to reduce everything to spiritual and moral - so they give you a verse.
- **Secular** people tend to reduce everything to physical and biochemical - so they give you a pill.

God NEVER reduces things down like that - but rather he sees a complexity to human nature.

LISTEN: People will say to me, “I wonder if God is trying to tell me something?”. I always laugh when people say that... God never stutters... *God’s whispers are louder than man’s screams*”.

He NEVER tries to tell you something... He SPEAKS or He Doesn’t. If you wonder... it’s not God.

They over simplified...

2. They Over Analyzed

Bildad speaks in Job 8:3–4 (ESV)

³ Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? ⁴ If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.

Wow, do you see what he is saying? Your kids did something horrible that brought this one them.

Zophar speaks in Job 11:3–6 (ESV)

³ Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? ⁴ For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God’s eyes.’ ⁵ But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, ⁶ and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. ***Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.***

He is saying - God knows that you deserve far worse than this.. because you are obviously extremely wicked.

These guys are vicious in their condemnation of Job...

Bildad - Job 25:4–6 (ESV)

⁴ How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? ⁵ Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; ⁶ how much less man, who is a ***maggot***, and the son of man, who is a ***worm!***”

Now - when a man loses 10 kids it may not be the best time to explain to him the doctrine of total depravity.

ILLUSTRATION: I think we can learn a lot from how Jesus responded at the funeral of Lazarus - the shortest verse in the bible. Jesus wept. Sometimes the best ministry is the ministry of tears.

A tear says - I care, I feel, I hurt for you and with you... a tear says you are worth my weeping... Nothing humanizes an individual or a situation like weeping. There is nothing more powerful than TRUTH mixed with TEARS. Remind them of the promises of God, but do so with tears.

They over simplified, they over analyzed...

3. They Over Spiritualized

Eliphaz speaks in Job 4:12–17 (ESV)

¹² “Now a word was brought to me stealthily; my ear received the whisper of it. ¹³ Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, ¹⁴ dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. ¹⁵ A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. ¹⁶ It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: ¹⁷ ‘Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?’

Eliphaz is suggesting that he has received a direct revelation from God about Job’s predicament.

I’ve always been very leery of people who are too quick to say, “God told me”. It’s the trump card, game over. Be very careful about going there. I believe God guides, impresses, and even reveals things to his children... but frankly, it’s not nor has it ever been normative.

ILLUSTRATION: I will never forget as long as I live setting in a meeting with a Pastor and his secretary came in and said, “Pastor you have a call from John, he needs some advice”. This Pastor said, “No, I’m not calling him - he didn’t take the first advice I gave him so I’m not giving it to him a second time”. I thought to myself - how arrogant. Do you think that you speak Ex-Cathedra? Are you a Prophet?

What about when the Bible says, “there is safety in a multitude of counselors?”

People who are truly mature will tend encourage you to seek advice from others to make sure that they line up.

Always enter into counseling with the understanding that your perspective may be off, you are fallible - God’s Word is never fallible, but sometimes how we use it is.

Proverbs 25:11 (ESV)

¹¹ A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

You can say the right thing at the wrong time, or with the wrong heart and it’s damaging.....

Proverbs 27:14 (ESV)

14 Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.

CLOSING: REMEMBER - when you step into tragedy you are walking on Holy Ground. The soul of man can at times be very fragile.

The Disciple's world had collapsed with the death of Jesus - and Thomas said I will not believe until I see the scars.

Sometimes, the only person who can speak into your life is someone who has earned the right through scars.....

John 20 the risen Jesus walks in twice he shows the disciples his scars, once to the whole group and once to Thomas.

These men would face incredible trials, ultimately all but one would die as martyrs - But Jesus is showing them that nothing has happened to them and nothing will happen to you that hasn't passed through nail scarred hands.

Matthew 12:20 (ESV)

20 a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench...

A BROKEN REED HE WILL NOT BREAK...All along the Jordan at many different places cattails grow.... A reed comes up and the cattail grows, the reed would be hollow. They would cut the reed while it was green, let it dry then bore holes in it to make flutes. Often they would try to cut it down and because it was green it wasn't easy to cut... it would give... therefore it was easy to bruise; it would turn a darker green and have to be discarded. It was useless it wouldn't play. They would take it throw it on the ground and crush it under foot. That would say to the others following after, just ignore this one, it's worthless, it's useless, it's been bruised.....

But, Jesus shall not break the bruised reed.

A SMOLDERING FLAX... They would crush those reeds under foot, let them dry, twist them together and make a cord out of it. That small rope was a wick... they dipped it down in oil. As it got old and the oil soaked in, it got to the point where it was useless, it would put off black smoke. And smoke up the house and have a very pungent smell. They would throw it out and crush it under foot. They were saying this cord is double useless... It couldn't be played as a flute, it couldn't be made into a wick.

Jesus said, "I won't quench the smoking flax".

Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar were miserable counselors... but Jesus was called, "Wonderful Counselor".