

Two Sides to Every Coin

Job: View from the Ashes series #5

by Bill Aumack

Max Lucado relates a story in his book in the Eye of the Storm. And there once was this old man. He was very poor. Very, very poor. He's a woodcutter and worked very hard in the forest, cutting firewood, dragging the logs in. Very, very poor, except he had a fine white stallion. And this was a magnificent animal. People had offered him huge sums of money. The king had offered him huge sums of money for this horse, but he would never sell. He said, this horse is like a person to me. He's a friend. How can you sell a friend? And the villagers told him, you're a fool. You could sell that horse and retire, not have to work so hard. He said, no, I'm not going to sell the horse. And he would never sell the horse.

Well, one day, as life went along, he woke up and the horse was gone. And the villagers gathered around and said, you old fool, we told you somebody would come and steal that horse. Now you have nothing. And the old man said, no, don't judge. Life comes in fragments. All we know is the horse is not here. And the villagers said, you're a fool. Somebody stole that horse and took it, and you've lost all the money. The old man says, no, no, no. All we know is the horse is not here. Whether that's a curse or a blessing, we do not know. And the villagers left and said, the old man's lost it. He's been working in the woods too long. He's going crazy. This is surely a curse.

About 15 days later, the horse shows up with 12 wild horses in tow. And once again, the villagers gather and go, you were right, we were wrong. Please forgive us. You were right, we were wrong. Please forgive us. This is truly a blessing. Now you have all of these horses and you can sell them for a profit. What a great day this is. And the old man said, now life comes in fragments. Whether this is a curse or a blessing, we don't know. God just gives us a piece at a time. The villagers said, old man, you're crazy. This is clearly a blessing. And they left.

The woodcutter's only son wanted to try and help him break some of the horses. So he was working with the horses, and one day he got bucked off a horse and badly broke both of his legs. And once again, the villagers were quick to come around and say, you were right. It wasn't a blessing, it was a curse. Now your only son can't help you. And who will take care of you in your old age? Guess what The old man said? Don't be so quick to judge. Life comes in fragments. This is only a piece. We don't know whether this is a curse or a blessing. And the villagers said, oh, you have to know. I mean, you are just being ridiculous, old man. And the old man said, you can't only read one page of a book and judge the whole book. Life is vast, and yet you judge all of life with one page or one word, and all you have is a fragment. No one knows if this is a blessing or a curse. And the villagers left.

A few months later, there was war broke out between this country and the neighboring country. And all the young men were gathered up to go fight in the war. And it didn't look good because the other country was bigger, stronger, more well equipped. And the villagers were sad because we will never see our sons again. But old man, it was a blessing your son didn't have to go because his legs were broken. The old man said, no, don't judge. We don't know if your sons are going to come back or if they're not. We don't know if it's a curse or a blessing. He says it's impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this. Your sons had to go to war and mine did not. And no one knows if it's a blessing or a curse. Only one is wise enough to know. Only God knows.

What a great way to live your life. Instead of trying to judge if everything is a blessing or a curse, take it as it comes. All we get is fragments. We can't see the beginning from the end. I don't know if you guys ever watch any science fiction, but you know, the Cyclops and Greek mythology are supposed to be able to see into the future, but the only thing they can see into the future is the day they die. What a horrible way to live, right? I'm glad that I can't see the whole future. There are times I wish I knew what was going to happen, I admit. But I'm glad I don't know. There's only one who's wise enough to know. And Job's friends could have used this advice.

We're in week number five, and today we look at Job's final friend, Zophar, and his advice that he gives to Job. Now, as you might guess, it's kind of similar to the advice of the previous two friends. But we're going to look at it here real quick because he does talk about some different things. Open your Bibles with me to Job 11. And Job 11 is Zophar's advice. And Job 12 is kind of Job's response. And I'm not going to look at Job's response this morning. I want to leave that to the small groups or for you to do on your own time and read Job 12. Today we're just going to look at Job 11. Okay, everybody there in Job 11, we're going to start with verses one to six. Now remember, there's been long speeches by the first two friends and long responses from Job. There's been a lot of words and Zophar starts talking about these words. Job 11:1-6, Then Zophar the Naamathite replied, are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated? Will your idle talk reduce others to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock? You say to God, my beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight. Oh how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom. For true wisdom has two sides. Know this, God has even forgot some of your sins.

So we see right off the bat that Zophar continues building on the previous arguments by being arrogant, showing a lack of empathy. Right? He's arrogant and he shows a lack of empathy. See, according to his friends, Job's issue is that he has unrepentant sin. You've been sinning and you haven't repented of it and so God is out to get you because of that. And Zophar kind of talks here too. We see in like verse 6 he talks about true wisdom has two sides and we don't really know kind of what he's talking about here. He doesn't expand on that, but maybe they had a saying similar to ours, right? There's two sides to every story, right? You need the whole picture. Proverbs 18:17 tells us in a lawsuit, the first to speak seems right until someone comes forward and cross examines. Right? We need the whole story before we can go forward.

And Zophar seems to be saying that God is punishing Job only for some of his sins. Job, you've been so sinful that God's being easy on you and only punishing you for some of your sins. Now how do you think that makes Job feel? What's happened to Job here recently? He's lost everything. He's lost his kids, he's covered in painful sores. And they're saying, hey, God should have been tougher on you. How? What more could God have done except kill me?

That's the only thing left at this point that might be viewed as mercy, right? So even if Zophar had been correct, and he wasn't, it was really out of line and really arrogant because he assumes to know what God is thinking. This is what God's done to you, and this is why he did it.

Let's Continue on. Verses 7 to 12 says, can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? That's an interesting question to ask when he just assumed that he knew what God was doing. They are higher than the heavens above. What can you do? They are deeper than the depths below. What can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea. If he comes along and confines you in prison and convenes a court, who can oppose him? Surely he recognizes deceivers. And when he sees evil, does he not take note? But the witness can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born human.

Now, just like the two friends before him, Zophar speaks to the brilliance and the wonder of God's majesty. Now, did anything Zophar said there in seven to 12, was that all true? Yeah, God's pretty powerful. God's pretty majestic, right? This is all true. And you'll see in Job's answer, he doesn't argue about that. He accepts it. In fact, at one point he says, I agree with you on this part, right? But this is a classic thing that the accuser does. He mixes truth with lies. And so he says something that's true and gets you going. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I get it. That's true. That's true, that's true. And then we say something that's not true, right? It's like a magician, right? There's no magic in the world. There's just misdirection. Hey look over here, look over here, look over here. And over here. He's doing something on the side, right? And that's what the accuser's doing. Look at all this truth. Look at all this truth. Look at all this truth. Let me slip in something here that's not so true.

Now, the Bible doesn't tell us that the devil impressed upon his three friends to come visit him, trip him up and lead him astray. But given everything else that the devil has done to Job, it wouldn't surprise me, right? That the devil sent them there with a mission to do this, and they're showing just no empathy at all for Job's situation, right?

You guys know what empathy is, right? How would you describe empathy? To feel what other people are feeling. If I came in here and said, man, last night,

in the middle of the night, I got up and I was walking and I stubbed my toe. Yes! Everybody goes, oh! Because most of us have done that, and we have empathy for that, right? Who here has stubbed their toe? Some of you are lying. You're in church and you didn't tell the truth, right? We've all stubbed our toe and it hurts. And if we say that, we have empathy for it. If I come in here and say, oh, my back hurts, Sergio has empathy. Some of us have empathy. Some of us have never had back pain, but we've had pain. And so we're still empathetic, right? And so sometimes it's easier to show empathy than others. But his friends show no empathy at all. None at all.

Let's keep going. Job 11:13-20 says, yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then free of fault, you will lift up your face. You will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble recalling it only as waters gone by. Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. You will be secure because there is hope. You will look about you and take your rest in safety. You will lie down with no one to make you afraid, and many will court your favor. But the eyes of the wicked will fail and escape will elude them, and their hope will become a dying gasp.

So Zophar describes the heart of the wicked here and how easy it is to get lost in sin. And it's true. It's true. It can be easy to do that, and some of us have had that happen to us in our lives. But Zophar assumes that all this is some divine retribution.

Now, remember, we don't know exactly when the story of Job occurs. Some people say it was right before the flood, some people say it was after the flood, but it's certainly before the Exodus, and all that happens with the Israelites, So it's in early history somewhere. But let's for the moment assume it's after the flood. Did the people who lived on the earth after the flood believe in the flood? Absolutely. They tried to build a tower to get to heaven, right? There were no deniers. Right? Like today we have deniers. We didn't go to the moon. The world's not round, really. Every planet in the known universe is round except ours. There's deniers, right? People that deny stuff. In that timeframe, nobody denied the flood. It was fact. You could walk up the

mountain and look at the boat. It was there. If you lived in that timeframe, what might you think about God? When he gets angry, bad things happen, right? Eliphaz Bildad and Zophar's understanding was wrong, but it's understandable how they arrived at that understanding, right? Because they lived in a time where they saw what happened when the world was full of sin. They didn't physically see with their own eyes, but it had just happened. Okay? And it was wrong. But we understand why they kind of thought that.

But Zophar seems to turn this into kind of a law of divine retaliation. You have sinned, and so you must pay. It's a very typical Old Testament view of God. He's just sitting there in heaven with lightning bolts and brim fire, waiting for somebody to trip up so he can strike them down, right? That's not what God is like. And Job argues back against that. Okay? But the biggest problem that his friends had was that they lacked any empathy. We talked about that in our small group. We were talking about this a little bit, and Pilar said, the biggest lesson that comes out of Job is don't be like Job's friends. There's truth to that. Don't be like Job's friends. Have some empathy.

We may think that a person actually has made some bad decisions, and what they're going through right now is a result of bad decisions and poor things that they did. We can still be empathetic. We can still say, I'm sorry you're going through this. We may be thinking, well, duh, you ended up here because you did all these things wrong. But we can still show empathy and still be compassionate. Okay? Initially, Job's friends mourned his suffering, but then seemed to lose the sense of compassion when they believed that Job was misrepresenting God.

So what we learn here is when people suffer around us, we try to help by explaining the why instead of just being present. Right? We always want to explain why this is happening. Why is this happening? What's going on? Just be present. Just be present with your friends.

I found a story online. I did some research on it, and I managed to acquire this letter here. I want to read it to you. This is a young woman who went to college, and this is in the days before of cell phones and emails and instant communications. And it's getting to be the end of the semester and she

realizes she hasn't written home, so she pens a letter to mom and dad and I want to read the letter to you. It's not too long, it says

Dear mom and dad, since I left for college, I have been remiss in writing and I'm sorry for my thoughtfulness and not having written before. I will bring you up to date now, but before you read on, please sit down. You are not to read any further unless you are sitting down.

Okay. Well then I'm getting along pretty well now. The skull fracture and the concussion I got when I jumped out the window of my dormitory when it caught on fire shortly after my arrival here is pretty well healed up now. I only spent two weeks in the hospital and now I can see almost normally and I only get those sick headaches once a day. Fortunately, the fire in the dormitory and my jump was witnessed by an attendant at the gas station near the dorm. He was the one who called the fire department and the ambulance. He also visited me in the hospital and since I had nowhere to live because of the burned out dormitory, he was kind enough to invite me to share his apartment with him. It's really a small basement room, but it's kind of cute. He's a very fine boy and we have fallen deeply in love and are planning to get married. We haven't gotten the exact date yet, but it will be for my pregnancy begins to show.

Yes, Mother and Dad, I am pregnant. I know how much you are looking forward to being grandparents and I know you will welcome the baby and give it the same love and devotion and tender care you gave me when I was a child. The reason for the delay in our marriage is my boyfriend has a minor infection which prevents us from passing our premarital blood test and I can carelessly caught it from him. I know that you will welcome him into our family with open arms. He is kind and although not well educated, he is ambitious. Although he is a different race and religion than ours. I know you often express tolerance will not permit you to be bothered by that.

Now that I have brought you up to date, I want to tell you that there was no dormitory fire. I did not have a concussion or a skull fracture. I was not in the hospital. I am not pregnant, I am not engaged, I am not infected and there is no boyfriend. However, I failed all my final exams and I wanted you to receive that in the proper perspective.

She wanted her parents to have a little empathy. Because you imagine if you wrote a letter and just said, I failed all of my exams. Your parents would be so mad. We're paying for college and she's up there messing around, failing all her classes. We're going to drive up there and set things straight. We are, right? They would be mad. But now they're like, okay, we may need to have a discussion, but you know, we'll deal with it. Have a little empathy. Be able to see both sides of the story.

Reflection. Are you present and empathetic for your friends or do you try to fix the situation? Guys talking to us, right? Got to fix it. The reason she came to me and asked me that is because she wants it fixed. Sometimes she doesn't. How do you tell when she wants it to be fixed and when she wants you to listen? Nobody knows. Nobody knows. You just have to try and figure that out as best you can. But sometimes just listen.

Challenges. Recognize that you don't know everything. Look for a situation this week where you can practice being empathetic to someone else's situation. You have to practice this. Look for situations where you can just be with somebody and listen and be empathetic to their situation and try and help them. Just deal with it, not fix it, just be with it. When they want you to fix it, they'll say, what should I do? Sometimes they just want somebody to be there. Let's practice that this week.

Let's bow our heads. Heavenly Father, thank you so much, Lord, for this story of Job. And although it's a lot of words, there's so much to learn here of how we can mean well like Job's friends. But be completely off track and be completely misguided. Lord, help us to be empathetic. When Jesus was here, he was empathetic. He cared about the people. He loved the people. Help us to model that so that others may be drawn to you. Be with us now in Jesus name, amen.