

When Helping Hurts **Job 4-7**

To this point in the book of Job, we have taken a deep look at Job's integrity along with the role of Satan. We have also seen the testing of Job through a unique lens. It can be difficult for us to remember that Job isn't privy to the information that we are privy to. He doesn't know the specifics of the spiritual battle that is going on behind the scenes nor do his friends that have come to comfort him. This week, that is exactly where we find ourselves. Job's three friends have come to visit job and over the next several weeks we are going to wade through their conversations with Job. I ask you to be patient as this will be a lengthy ride but a beneficial one.

As I mentioned before, these three friends of Job often get a bad rap. There are a lot of valid reasons for that but on some level we have to recognize that on some level we should commend them as well. For one, they travelled a great distance to visit Job. This most certainly took up a great deal of their time and as we all know, time is valuable. Speaking of time, they sat with Job in the middle of a trash pile for seven days, grieving with him without saying a word. How many people do you know that would do that or you? Better yet, how many people might you do that for? Yes, these friends offer bad advice and counsel. Sometimes they speak truth and it is poorly applied – their method of counseling isn't very effective.

This evening we are going to look at the interaction between Job and Eliphaz. He is the first of the three friends to break the silence after seven days. This conversation shows us how helping can hurt. That may seem like a contradicting statement but I believe that is exactly what we see – a concerned friend who has good intentions and yet all he does is add to Job's misery.

*Job 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, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. **They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him.**

As we look at the conversations between Job and his three friends, I want us to remember this verse of Scripture. It tells us that these three men had a genuine concern for their friend Job and good intentions. Their mission was to show him sympathy and comfort him. This is not what happens as they quickly lose sight of their original intent. We will circle back to this point, but how often are we guilty of doing the same as we interact with others? Appropriate actions (or the lack thereof) are what brings comfort, not good intentions. The same holds true for every aspect of our Christian life – God desires appropriate actions that move well beyond good intentions.

I. Bad Information from bad sources (Job 4)

Maybe it is just me, but reading some of this discourse is like reading a text message. What I mean by that is you don't get all the context. It would be so valuable to see the expressions of Eliphaz as he is delivering this speech because it would help you get a sense of the tone of his message.

Verse 2 is a good example of what I am talking about. Eliphaz asks Job if he can speak. One can interpret this in two completely different ways and as I searched out commentaries that is exactly what I found.

- Is Eliphaz genuinely asking his friend if he is ready to hear his council?
- Has Eliphaz grown tired of the wailing and is going to speak regardless?

I tend to lean toward the latter due to the content of what he says.

Eliphaz begins by commending Job for all of the council that he has provided others during his life but he quickly chides him for now being in the position of the counselee and being unable to heed his own advice.

I think this is a legitimate jab by Eliphaz due to the fact that his statement is eerily similar to the words of the chief priests and elders at Jesus crucifixion in Matthew 27:41 – He has saved so many others and yet he cannot save himself.

In verse 6 Eliphaz hits Job with a real dagger – Isn't your confidence in God and your integrity your hope? It is as if Eliphaz is saying to Job – It's funny that someone who trusts so much in God and finds his hope in him at this moment appears to have no hope.

Eliphaz is somewhat subtly going somewhere with this. He thinks Job is guilty. He says so much in verse 7. When have the innocent ever been treated like this and completely cut off from God and everything they once had?

Through our eyes, there is one obvious answer to Eliphaz's question: Jesus! We also know that Job falls into this category because we have the privilege of Ch. 1 & 2 that he doesn't have.

Eliphaz's theology centers on a doctrine of retribution – the problem is that it isn't true, at least not in our temporal setting and condition. The righteous do experience trouble and the wicked do experience material blessing.

I believe it is crucial that we understand how Eliphaz developed this theology so we can avoid the same mistake.

Eliphaz's bad information/theology is rooted in bad sources. Namely, personal experience and an untested spirit.

A. Personal experience

Listen to Eliphaz's opening statement in verse 8, "As I have seen." He has concluded that Job's calamity has been brought on at the hands of his unconfessed sin – because that is what he has seen and experienced in his own life.

"As I have seen" should be a huge flashing neon sign of warning to us!

First, it is mighty arrogant of Eliphaz to assume that his personal experience is broad enough to set the standard for all of humanity. This is a prideful position. Secondly, while personal experience can be of some value, it should never be given too much value. We live in a day an age where this is a serious problem. Truth has become relative and personal experience is driven by one's definition of "truth." This is a dangerous proposition. Additionally, Scripture tells us that our hearts are deceitful and often lead us astray. If our experiences are driven by our feelings we are doubly in trouble. Personal experience does have the ability in some situations to guide us but it should never be our north star! Here, Eliphaz is allowing his own experience to set his theology.

B. An Untested Spirit

In verses 12-21, Eliphaz describes how his argument is also supported by the council he received from a spirit. Again, this should be a flashing neon sign of warning to us!

Can we get a word from the Lord or the Holy Spirit? Yes, of course, but it will come in a distinct fashion.

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

There does not appear to be any testing from Eliphaz and there are some key things that we see in the description of the encounter that would appear to tip us off to the fact that this spirit isn't of God.

- Stealth
- Creepy
- No Authority

In addition, there appears to be no true revelation here but a general truism that appears to accuse Job. Who accuses – the accuser does. It is interesting to note that biblical historians have noted that the Sabeans and Chaldeans in ch.1 (the ones that raided Job's livestock) would have possibly been far from home making their behavior odd. Some also note that the Sabeans were known as traders and not bandits making their behavior in the story of Job odd. This seems to imply that Satan influenced their behavior and also leaves the door open that something similar here is going on with Eliphaz.

II. Good information and Poor Practice (Job 5:1-27)

Eliphaz shifts gears in chapter 5. To this point he has offered up bad theology and information. In chapter 5, his words provide some truth but his method of counseling is beyond poor.

A. A Lack of Mercy and Kindness

It is interesting that he begins this section by sarcastically prodding Job to call upon some mediator. Eliphaz is making the point that no one is going to come to Job's aid until he comes clean. He is off-base here because Job has nothing to come clean about. However, this is another reference in Job to the need for a mediator, yet another shadow of Christ to come that Job will reference as well later.

Eliphaz shifts to speaking in 3rd person, seemingly a way to avoid speaking directly about Job's situation, but it is clear to see what is going on. He spews general truths about the error of a fool and the effect on his children but there are striking similarities with the fate of Job's own children. Again, this is a direct jab at Job that assumes his guilt. It is easy to see hear that emotion and Eliphaz's heart has led him astray. Why did he come to meet Job (2:11)? It appears as though now he simply wants to be right.

There is no comfort here – no mercy and kindness.

B. A Condescending Tone

In verse 8, we see yet another shift. Pay attention to what Eliphaz is really saying here. "As for me, I would seek God."

There is no compassion here, only a condescending tone. Eliphaz is essentially saying, Listen Job, if I were in your shoes, this is what I would do. Oh, and by the way, let me tell you a few things about God as well.

If we are honest with ourselves, how often are we guilty of the same error as Eliphaz. In our desire to make it right or fix it, we jump to conclusions thinking we have all the information when in reality we don't – we don't know what it is like to be in the other person's shoes and yet we act like it's just a simple fix. There are few things that can sting a person much more than this.

To make matters even worse, Eliphaz flaunts a relationship and knowledge of God in Job's face. By saying here is what I would do, and let me tell you a few things about God, Eliphaz is essentially saying, you must not be doing these things and you must not really know God. This flies in the face of what we know of Job in the first few chapters of the book – words from God Himself!

What Eliphaz speaks of God in these verses is true, yet it doesn't apply to Job's situation or provide Job comfort.

C. Improper Application to General Truths

In verse 17, Eliphaz calls on Job to snap out of it! He argues that Job is being disciplined by God and that Job should rejoice in that fact. He shouldn't despise the discipline of God.

Again, there is some truth to this. God's discipline, just like any father's discipline is a sign of love. For God to let one of his followers wander in sin would be the opposite of love and Eliphaz calls on Job to recognize this. God is demonstrating His love for Job.

There is only one problem with this advice, it doesn't apply to Job. In Eliphaz's defense, he doesn't know this but at the same time we shouldn't be so quick to judge a situation when we don't know the whole truth.

Eliphaz continues and describes blessings that God can most certainly deliver. Some of these blessings are ultimately fulfilled in the life to come. However, I believe some of them should cause us to raise an eyebrow. How is Eliphaz certain that these will apply to Job?

- Your offspring will be many
- You will live to an old age

Eliphaz appears to transform into a prosperity gospel preacher, and quite a good one. Again, we don't have to look any further than the life of Christ to see that the innocent can and will suffer. This doctrine of retribution is not true!

What Eliphaz says last should also grab our attention. Notice in verse 27 the phrase, "we have searched out." This seems to imply that these three friends have developed a game plan on their travels. They all share the thoughts that Eliphaz has expressed – they were developed before they had even seen Job's situation with their own eyes.

III. Job's Rebuttal (Job 6:1-30)

A. Don't Pretend To Know My Pain

Job begins his rebuttal to Eliphaz by drawing a comparison to his frustrations, anger, and calamity and the weight of all the sand of the sea. What he is saying is that although Eliphaz appears to make a good case he has no clue about the pain that Job has gone through and is currently going through.

The loss of his family and all of his possessions was great but what weighs on Job even more is the idea that God is against him. Job acknowledges that his comments and frustration has been rash, perhaps they are overboard, but Job declares that is so for good reason!

B. Comfort or Criticism? (v.14-23)

Job goes on to rebuke Eliphaz for lacking kindness. Job argues that this is what true friends would have brought but they have failed. He compares them to a failing stream – a source of water that disappears – it promises relief and comfort but fails.

Job gets stern and argues that Eliphaz assumes his guilt because if Job is innocent then Eliphaz would have to come to terms with the idea that he could experience some of Job's calamities himself. Therefore, all he has to offer is criticism because it makes him feel better.

C. Where is Your Substance?

Lastly, Job argues that the accusations of Eliphaz offer no substance. In verse 24, Job clearly tells Eliphaz that he is ready to hear what the specific charge against him is. Job is tired of the generalities. He is confident in his righteousness but the reality is that leaves him as confused as ever.

IV. Job's Prayer (Job 7:1-21)

As we conclude this section of the book, we see Job enter into prayer before God. It is important that we recognize this and in fact, this is something we will see each time Job converses with one of his friends. What should stand out to us is not necessarily what we see, for we know that Job is a righteous man, but what we don't see. Eliphaz has claimed to have a knowledge of God that Job does not and yet not one time do we see him or the other two friends pray or converse with God. Another flashing neon sign – WARNING!

Job's prayer focuses on three questions.

A. Where is my reward?

Job declares that a man's days are spent working. A hired hand works hard but at the end of the day he expects a wage. Job claims that even under the hardest conditions, a man is refreshed at night – a semi-reward – and yet Job cannot even get sleep. He cries out, where is my reward – the wages for my work?

B. Where is my hope and rest?

Job also continues to bemoan his very existence. His language demonstrates very clearly the great pain and agony he is in, both emotionally and physically. He sees no end in sight and is clinging to very little hope if any.

C. Why?

Job ends his prayer with the question why? If I have sinned, what have I done? Why am I your target? Why am I a burden to you?

These seem like harsh words. In some sense they are, but they are honest words and I believe they are a key to faith – Job never stops seeking God.

V. Personal Implications

A. Not all advice is good advice

Eliphaz started with good intentions. I genuinely believe he wanted to help his friend. However, all he did was make matters worse. His bad theology didn't help. It should serve as a strong reminder to us that the source of our information matters greatly. Primarily all that we offer other individuals should be rooted in Scripture.

*Personal experience should never be our primary source – it does not trump the truth of Scripture!

*We should also be leery of any word, dream, or vision that we perceive to be from the Lord. While these can be genuine, God primarily speaks to us through His word. Scripture commands us to test the spirits – all other forms of communication should line up with Scripture.

Charles Spurgeon - **Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.**

Lastly, we should be very cautious about assumptions. Eliphaz assumed Job was guilty because it lined up with his worldview/theology. However, Eliphaz was wrong – Job was not guilty and as such, a vast majority of his advice did not apply to Job.

B. Our motives matter

Initially Eliphaz sought to comfort Job but his motives quickly changed. The longer Eliphaz spoke, the more it seems he wanted to be perceived as wise and correct. His motive quickly centered on himself and not Job.

C. Our methods matter

In the second half of Eliphaz's speech to Job we find a good deal of truth. The truth doesn't necessarily apply to Job's situation, but even if it did it would have little chance at being effective due to Eliphaz's method of counseling. He is presumptuous, condescending, and prideful. The way in which we attempt to provide comfort matters greatly.

What was Eliphaz's greatest success in this? His 7 days of mourning alongside Job in silence! This is where he was most effective. Sometimes the best counseling is saying nothing at all but simply being present. When it is time to speak and offer other counsel, our methods matter greatly.

Job says as much in 6:14 – shouldn't you be kind?

Romans 2:4 – God's kindness is what is meant to lead to repentance. Eliphaz didn't get the memo on this!

D. True faith continues to seek God

Some of the lessons that we see in the book of Job are on constant repeat throughout the book. While at times I may sound like a broken record, I don't think we can hear these truths too much.

Job 7 should be both a strong encouragement and reminder to us – Through it all we should continue to seek God.

Job never questions or curses God – He questions why as he is confused by his situation but he never questions God. He does more than this though – Even in his confusion he continues to seek God out. Trials will do one of two things – they will either drive us away from God or to God. Job makes the right choice. He desperately wants his hurt to be healed but even though he is not being healed in this very moment, he has the faith to keep looking for God.