

## Sermon- Grieving Well, Part II

Scripture: Job 13:2—14:6

Sunday, May 24, 2020

After three sermons focused on Job's friends and looking at how people sometimes add to suffering by dealing in self-centered and insensitive ways with those who are suffering, we turned last week to how Job responded to his suffering. We looked at a model of grief pioneered by a famous psychologist called Elizabeth Kubler Ross. This model describes 5 stages of grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Each of these stages can be done well or badly. When I say well, I mean in a Biblical and Godly way. And when it is dealt with well it leads to healing and spiritual growth. On the other hand each stage can be dealt with in a worldly way that leads to bad outcomes. Now Job is commended by God both in the beginning of this ordeal, that means to start with, he was someone who lived a God-fearing life. And God vindicates him at the end of the book as well, that means he dealt with the challenges he was thrown within the book well. We know this because in the 10 speeches that Job has given you see each of the first 4 stages of grief circulating throughout these speeches. Thus looking at Job's response is an opportunity for us to learn how to grieve well. And that means doing all the stages of grief well. Last week we looked at the first two stages of grief, denial and anger. This week we are going to look at the next three stages, bargaining, depression and acceptance. So let's get started.

Phase 3, the bargaining phase. Let me first explain what the bargaining phase is. In the bargaining phase, the grieving person starts negotiating with life itself or even God. They say, "if you do this, I will do this". What is going on is that the individual here is so desperate to get their old life back that they are willing to make some major changes if the powers that be can make their old life come back. In Job's case, because his situation is really desperate, the bargaining is really desperate too. In 6:9 he says, ***I wish***

**he would crush me. I wish he would reach out his hand and kill me.** He is wishing that God brings him death and a means of relieving his pain. In 7:16 he tells God, **“Oh leave me alone for my few remaining days”**. He is asking God to take his attention of him so he will not be tested anymore. In 10:20 he tells God **to leave me alone that I may have a moment of comfort, before I leave -never to return**. So in this speech he is telling God, if you give me a moment of comfort. And in return he would get out of God’s way for ever. Then in chapter 13 his bargaining takes on a different ask. He asks God for two things. I quote,

**<sup>20</sup>O God, grant me these two things,  
and then I will be able to face you.**

**<sup>21</sup>Remove your heavy hand from me,  
and don’t terrify me with your awesome presence.**

**<sup>22</sup>Now summon me, and I will answer!**

Here he asks God to take his terrifying hand from him and not to overwhelm him with his presence and in turn he would be answerable to God for his life. Then in verse 23, He wants to ask God what he has done wrong, and two verses later he follows it up with **“would you terrify a leaf blowing in the wind? Would you chase dry straw?”** In other words he is telling God, tell me what I have done wrong without overwhelming me with your presence and I will acknowledge that I am nothing more that a leaf blowing in the wind or a dry straw in your presence.

In 14:6 he says, **leave us alone, let us rest. We are like hired hands, so let us finish our work in peace**. Here he is saying, leave me alone God and I will finish my remaining tasks I have in his world in peace.

Job in his bargaining or negotiation phase with God begs for some reprieve from his pain and in turn is willing to do anything including appearing before God and having a Q&A

session with Him or finishing his life in peace and quietly disappearing from this world forever. Anything for just a moment of peace in his remaining days.

Now to appreciate Job's bargaining phase, we have to look at how people often handle their bargaining phase. People often take a very different approach to their "if-thens". If people have lots loved ones who did not drink or smoke and still died young, they might say, "what is the point of me being restrained, I should do what I want because depriving myself does not make a difference anyway". That is saying, **if** I take the restraints of my life away, **then** I can escape the pain and futility of this loss in my life. But there is the opposite of that where some people might pursue pain like cutting themselves. The logic there is, "**if** I experience physical pain, **then** I can forget or not notice the emotional pain".

Some people might be caught in a never ending guilt cycle. It works like this. They might think, **if** I had parented differently, **then** this would not have happened or **if** we had not got on that flight, **then** that would have not happened.

The problem with that is because it is about the past that can never be changed, the person can get stuck in this phase and never move beyond this. Here is another problem with any of those approaches. In the bargaining phase, people are extremely vulnerable because they are willing to make extreme changes to their life in exchange for the normalcy they associate with the past before the tragedy. In that vulnerability, when extreme choices are made that are not healthy it could lead down a path of destruction. The only safe place to be in a moment of great vulnerability is in the presence of a loving God. That is why Job's choice of directing his bargaining to God was the best choice. God is big enough to hear all of nonsensical ramblings, our impractical requests and impossible wish lists. We can even lay it on thick to God, telling God that he does not care and that he is not fair and even that He is a big bully who is unjustly persecuting you. Job said all these things. And the God of the Bible quietly listened and took it all in

and still showed up to talk to Job. God even vindicates him and chastises Job's friends who were trying very vigorous defenses of God! Finally God even restores to Job everything he has lost 7 fold.

In other words when you bargain with God, you can **never** lose. When you bargain with the world, your flesh or Satan you will **always** lose. Take your bargaining only to God. That will keep you protected in your moment of vulnerability and move you to another phase in your grief.

The next phase we are going to look at today is the **depression** phase. Depression is the emotion most commonly associated with grief. Depression is entered into when the person typically has moved beyond what has happened and turns their attention to their present situation. And when they look at their present situation they find that they are still living in the present reality but because a loved one has gone or situation has changed there is a great "emptiness" in the present. Suddenly, when looking at the present, they are confronted with a big vacuum. And in that moment, the sufferer feels that such a vacuum is too much to handle. And the way they respond when they are overwhelmed is to withdraw from everything. In this phase there is a lack of will to keep on living.

In Job's case you see it in 6:11 where he says, "***I don't have the strength to endure, I have nothing to live for***" or in 6:13 where he says, "***I am utterly helpless without a chance of success***". In 17:1 he says, "***My spirit is crushed, and my life is nearly snuffed out. The grave is ready to receive me***". Or in 17:11 he says, "***My days are over.***

***My hopes have disappeared.***

***My heart's desires are broken***".

You can hear the sense of despair during this phase. And the sufferer does not want to be around anyone at this time. Often the depression phase is the longest phase in the grief cycle. Now this phase too can be done well or can go completely off the rails.

When we look at Job, the first thing you might notice is that he is willing to express his despair. Often people are overwhelmed and are too ashamed to admit and express their deep sense of despair and helplessness. They think, if they express their helplessness, the world will not look upon them well. So very often people may even cover up what they are feeling deep inside and externally act as if everything is normal. There is a famous British poster you might be familiar with that says, "Keep calm and carry on". A depressed person is often working on a variation of that principle which is "Keep it bottled inside and carry on". Of course this is never a good idea. Because when the disconnect between what is showing on the outside and what one is feeling on the inside grows to an extreme level, then something snaps, leading the sufferer to take extreme measures and sometimes even with their lives. Admitting, "my spirit is crushed and my heart's desires are broken" is deeply humbling. But being able to express this openly takes such a level of security that it is also deeply liberating. Expressing one's despair does not change the situation, but it does equalize the inside of ourselves with the outside and reduces this dangerous pressure build-up. And when we express this ultimately to God, we are humbling ourselves before God and that is the safest place to humble ourselves. James 4:10 says "**Humble yourselves before God and He will exalt you**". If you look at the context of that verse it says in verse 9 "**Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom**" and then it says **humble yourselves before God and He will exalt you**. James is saying, change your laughter to mourning if you have to because it is that important to humble yourself before God. That is what Job did. He humbled himself before God and an amazing thing happens. God appears in a whirlwind and speaks to Job. Now we will get into what God tells Job in the next sermon. But today our focus is on Job's stages of grief. After God finishes speaking and we get to the last chapter of the book of Job we see a completely new situation. In chap 42 verse 4 to 6 Job tells God, "**You said, 'Listen and I will speak!**

*I have some questions for you,  
and you must answer them.'*

<sup>5</sup> *I had only heard about you before,  
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.*

<sup>6</sup> *I take back everything I said,  
and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.*

This is an amazing moment of transformation. Let me point out a few things going on here. Firstly, you see in Job's bargaining phase he had asked to speak to God and for God to speak to him. I want to point out to you that Job got everything he asked for in his prayers and much more. God does show up. God does speak to him, and God even vindicates him. And as a result something amazing happens in Job's inner being. Before the tragedies happened to Job, he could say he had heard about God. Now after everything, he can say, "I have seen you with my own eyes". Job had a personal encounter with God and now he has a powerful testimony which nobody can deny. Secondly, as a result of his spiritual growth, he has come to a new place in his grief. In verse 6 he says, "***I take back everything I said and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance***". What is happening here is that Job's denial, anger, bargaining and even depression have all vanished. Job has come to a new place. He has come to the place of "acceptance". He has accepted what God wants to do in his life, he has accepted the reality of his present situation, he has accepted his new normal. And he is willing to sit in the "dust and ashes" to show his repentance of his earlier refusal to accept the new reality of his life. This is what healing of the soul looks like. When we can come to this place where we can be at peace with God, with ourselves, with our past and our present, then we can say we have come to a place of healing. And when we come to this place with God, we now have a new capacity to deal with life and to be used by God. This is the place God wants to bring us all to. When God brought Job to this place of healing, He also restored Job's blessings 7 times of what he had earlier. He blessed Job

so that he could be a blessing to others because God's capacity has grown now. Through the tragedies in Job's life, God brought new spiritual growth.

I pray that God will also enable each of us to experience this kind of spiritual growth in our own lives so that we will have a new and powerful testimony to declare to the world. And through our renewed witness of God, may He use us in ways that are way beyond anything we can presently dream off. Let us pray.