

Intimations of Hope

How can we share hope with those around us who are discouraged?

Job Friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. (Job 2:11)

Regrettably, Job's friends are not able to endure the mystery of his suffering, so they jump to conclusions about its source.

The first of the three, Eliphaz, acknowledges that Job has been a source of strength to others (Job 4:3-4). But then he turns and puts the blame for Job's suffering squarely on Job himself. "Think now," he says, "who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:7-8).

Job's second friend, Bildad, says much the same. "See, God will not reject a blameless person nor take the hand of evildoers" (Job 8:20).

The third friend, Zophar, repeats the refrain. "If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, do not let wickedness reside in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure, and will not fear... Your life will be brighter than the noonday" (Job 11:14-15, 17).

The First Friend: Eliphaz

After Job's complaints in Job 3, Eliphaz is the first of the friends to speak. Chapters 4—5 contain his first speech, which focuses on the theme of the innocent prospering. In other words, Eliphaz thought that Job, who was obviously not prospering, must have done something wrong. No life encountering such suffering can be innocent, according to Eliphaz. **(Read Job 4:1-8)**

Eliphaz offers a third speech, recorded in Job 22. This time, he accuses Job of great wrongdoing: "Is not your wickedness great? / Are not your sins endless?" (Job 22:5). He then proceeds to list all of Job's supposed sins (verses 6–9). From Eliphaz's perspective, God would only allow great evil to befall someone who had done something very bad. Job replies by asking for God to intervene on his behalf (Job 23). **(Read Job 22:1-10)**

Following the speech by Eliphaz, Job replies with a statement regarding his innocence. Eliphaz provides a second speech, in Job 15, asserting that Job does not fear God. If Job did fear God, Eliphaz reasons, he would not face such suffering. Job responds that his friends are "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2). **(Read Job 15:1-12)**

God does intervene. God speaks on Job's behalf and rebukes Job's friends, saying, "My anger burns against you . . . for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7). Eliphaz and his companions are required to offer burnt offerings, and Job prays on their behalf. In the end, Job's fortunes are restored (doubled), and he is blessed with new children in place of those who had died.

Eliphaz is an example of someone responding with the world's wisdom to suffering. It made sense to Eliphaz that suffering was the consequence of sin and that, if a person suffered, he was being punished by God. However, Eliphaz was wrong. Job's life is a clear example of how sometimes the innocent suffer. God can use suffering as part of His divine plan to strengthen a believer's life and to change the lives of others for His glory.

²³ "Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! ²⁴ That they were engraved on a rock With an iron pen and lead, forever! ²⁵ For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; ²⁶ And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*, That in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. *How* my heart yearns within me! ²⁸ If you should say, 'How shall we persecute him?'— Since the root of the matter is found in me, ²⁹ Be afraid of the sword for yourselves; For wrath *brings* the punishment of the sword, That you may know *there is a judgment.*" **(Read Job 19:23-29)**

Job's friends did at least three things right that can be seen in Job 2:11–13. First, they came to him when he was suffering. Second, they empathized with him: "they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads" (verse 12). Third, they spent time with him. Verse 13 states they were with him for seven days before they offered their advice. They commiserated with their friend in silence.

But those who wait (*hope*) on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. **(Isaiah 40:31)**