

## Moving beyond Grief

### Job 42

When my wife Jasmine had finished University she started out in her first job,  
and on the first day in the office she was assigned to a senior person  
who had the job of helping Jasmine get settled in.  
The senior person decided that some introductions were order  
and so they walked over to few cubicles nearby  
where Jasmine was introduced with the following words  
“Hello Mike, I’d like to introduce you to our newest employee, Yasmine!”

Now at this point Jasmine had to make a decision!  
Does she correct her senior right there,  
or does she just go with it and try and correct things later?  
Jas decided to say nothing, best not to embarrass the older colleague

However, Jasmine didn’t realize just how thorough this orientation would be.  
As they made their way around each desk, on each floor of the office,  
‘Yasmine’ was introduced to everyone who worked there.  
Then they came to the final desk.  
At this point the mentor said “Ahah! now we come to another new person,  
I’m sorry, I’m not sure I’ve learnt you name yet!  
And so the other new employee puts out his hand and says  
“I’m Luke!” and Jasmine puts out her hand and says “I’m Yasmine!”

It’s one of those great family stories that we tell in our family from time to time,  
Jasmine tells it much better than I can.  
But I tell it to you today to illustrate the difficulties of starting a new chapter.  
Starting a new job can make for an awkward time,  
How do you relate to management, esp when they get your name wrong?  
What’s the best way to make an impression?  
How quickly can you be expected to settle in?  
Not easy waters to navigate.

Throughout our lives there will be many moments when we enter into a new phase.  
Many of these new chapters will involve the addition of a new relationship:  
a new flatmate, a new spouse, a new child, a new boss.  
But new chapters also begin when something or someone is *taken away*:  
the death of a parent, or a spouse, or a child, the loss of a job or a friendship.  
These are times when we will descend into grief,  
and eventually we’ll have to think about what life will be like after the trauma.

Today we come to the end of the book of Job,  
a book which follows a man’s decent into grief  
after suffering the massive trauma of losing his family and his wealth.

But today we read of Job's transition out of grief and into a new chapter.

Often when we talk about suffering we are focused on the questions of  
 why such suffering occurs  
 and also about how we might endure suffering well,  
 and these have been the two main questions we've been thinking about  
 but today we have a different question, one I don't think we ask very often,  
 and that is about life after the trauma, life after the grieving.

In no way does Job give us a definitive programme of how to start over after tragedy,  
 but as we see Job make this transition  
 there are a number of helpful things we can observe  
 The first is to notice **the place of God's word** in making this transition.

Last week we heard, for the first time in very long book,  
 the words of God himself as he addressed Job in his suffering.  
 and God reminded Job that he does care about the injustice of the situation,  
 and he gave a hint as to why Job suffered as he did;  
 in his description of the behemoth and the Leviathan  
 God was hinting that demonic forces were at play in Job's downfall.

And what impact has God's word made on Job as he sits in his sorrow?

Ch 42:1 Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

It was a word that reminded Job of God's insurmountable power;  
 despite the rocky path that Job was asked to travel,  
 God remains in control and his plans remain in place

God's word also makes Job realize  
 that he cannot understand everything there is to know about his situation.  
 Verse 3 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke  
 of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.  
 It seems that as God was speaking a light went on for Job,  
 a moment when he realized that there was much more to his suffering  
 than he could ever hope to comprehend.

And so with God's words still ringing in his ears, Job comes to his point of transition:

Verse 4 "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.  
 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Verse 6 is a very difficult verse to understand,  
 in our NIV Bibles it sounds like Job is standing before God with his tail  
 between his legs,  
 repenting of his wrongdoing after the stern words of correction from God.  
 But some scholars suggest the sense of the verse should be taken differently.

According to some,  
 what Job is expressing here is not a repentance from his sin  
 but rather a turning away *from his mourning*;  
 not repenting *in* dust and ashes but repenting *of* dust and ashes.

And I think this makes perfect sense of the book as a whole.  
 Job is consistently presented as a blameless man,  
 and he already is in dust and ashes, and has been since ch 2.  
 So he can't turn towards dust and ashes, but he can turn away from them.  
 Job is basically saying that his time of mourning has come to an end,  
 that it is now time to enter into the next chapter of his life.  
 And hearing from God has been an important part in making it to this point.

I don't for a minute want to suggest that all a grieving person needs is the Bible.  
 That if someone is suffering,  
 then all they need is a Bible verse or two to solve all their problems.  
 Given the length of the book  
     I think it's safe to assume that *time*  
             has been an important factor in Job's healing  
 And even though his friends have not spoken in a particularly helpful way,  
     I would think the lengthy conversations have given Job  
             an opportunity to *process* what has happened to him,  
 But it's also true that *God's word* is a vital ingredient in Job's renewal.

And nor do I want to suggest that this particular word is the only word that's helpful.  
 It may be helpful to some to hear a restatement of God's power  
                             and of our inability to comprehend all his ways,  
 but God's word has many things to say to us.  
 It may be that a reminder of God being a refuge is what's needed:  
 Psalm 45 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we  
 will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.  
 Or it maybe that the image of God as our shepherd is one that works  
 Psalm 23 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
 he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for  
 his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are  
 with me; your rod and your staff,  
 they comfort me.  
 Different images, perhaps effective in different ways for different people,  
 but each with the potential to help those who are suffering  
 as they navigate their way through the darkness.

My usual practice when I conduct pastoral visits  
 is to always have a couple of passages of Scripture ready.  
 And the pastoral visit can be very simple:  
 spend some time asking about the person's situation  
 and then read the Bible and pray. You don't have to be a minister to do that!

Each one of us can be a reader of the Bible,  
and so each one of us can potentially navigate  
to a few key texts that offer light to the downcast.

We all know that having some first aid training is a good idea,  
and the same thing can be said for spiritual first aid,  
knowing a few key things you can do  
to minister to our brothers and sisters in crisis.  
Knowing a couple of key Bible passages is a good start.  
Hearing from God gave some life back to Job, as it will give life back to us.

And the first task that Job has to do in this new chapter is not an easy one.

**Verse 7** After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.”<sup>8</sup> So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.

These three friends have not treated Job very well;  
they accused Job of hypocrisy,  
they offered harsh words instead of consoling words,  
and it's with great irony that God asks Job to pray for these three individuals  
because nowhere in the book do we hear them praying for Job  
or even *offering* to pray for him.  
I can imagine God wasn't the only one angry with these three men,  
Job would have been upset with them as well.

But such is the grace of God  
that he offers mercy to these three men before they even ask for it,  
and he recruits Job to minister to these undeserving men.  
That may have been difficult,  
for it would have been challenging enough to see these men receiving grace  
let alone be the one to administer it.

And God still asks us to minister to those who may have hurt us.

But I tell you, Jesus says in Matt 5:44 love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven.  
It may be that part of our new life after grief  
is to imitate God by offering grace to those who've hurt us.

This is a path taken by many of our fellow Christians in the middle-east at the moment. On Palm Sunday a bomb exploded at the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo. Naseem Faheem, himself a Christian, was the security guard who blocked the terrorist from entering the building directly, redirecting the bomber to check point where the bomb was then detonated. Naseem was one of the first to die in that attack.

In the days following his widow was interviewed on Egyptian television where she said these words: "I'm not nagry at the one who did this. I'm telling him 'may God forgive you, and we also forgive you. Believe me, we forgive you.'"

On hearing this—and you can see the footage on YouTube—the Muslim TV host was stunned into silence for 12 seconds (an eternity on live TV), before he declared "Egyptian Christians are made of steel! How great is this forgiveness that you have!"

Maybe not made of steel, but certainly filled with the Holy Spirit,  
the one who leads us to put Christ's command to love our enemy  
into practice by imitating the grace offered by our Father in heaven.

I wonder whether your grief is the product of other people's wickedness.  
Maybe others have compounded your grief by saying foolish things.  
It would seem that the journey out of that grief involves a stage (or stages)  
where you work out how you're going to deal with these hurtful people.  
It starts by praying for them. Then comes a willingness to forgive.  
And then—if the other party is willing to repent of their wrongdoing—  
you can start to think about genuine reconciliation.

After Job had performed this ministry for his friends,  
we catch a glimpse of the new life that Job was now entering into.  
Verse 10 After Job had prayed for his friends,  
the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.  
In fact, Verse 12 the LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part.

I have to admit, I find this last section the hardest part of the book to swallow,  
because it all works out ok in the end.  
If only that was the case for everyone!  
Perhaps I would gladly suffer  
if I was guaranteed a double or triple blessing in this life.  
But we know that isn't always the case, don't we?  
Life just doesn't work out like that.

This is where the New Testament can help us.

Job is only mentioned once in the New Testament,  
he makes an appearance in the book of James. Ch 5.7 (turn)

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup>You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup>Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!  
<sup>10</sup>Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Notice the context, James is encouraging his readers to wait until the Lord's return,

and it's in that context that he cites Job's perseverance and final blessing.

God does indeed promise us physical blessing just as he promised Job,  
it's just that the timing is a little different.  
Job saw his restoration within his own lifetime,  
And while I know that blessing in *this life*  
is something each one of us longs for with all our heart.  
The *promise* is that it will finally arrive when Jesus returns.

This is not to say that God's blessing is absent from the here and now.  
—God *does listen* and he *does respond* and he *does bless*—  
But even those present blessings will be nothing compared  
to what God has for us in the future.  
And the blessing that we will receive after Jesus' return  
will be even greater than the blessing that Job received.  
You notice in v 11 of Job 42 that there was still a need for Job to be consoled  
over his troubles; Job's brothers and sisters comforted and consoled him over all the  
trouble the LORD had brought on him.  
Job's recovery was an ongoing one, yet we are told that when Jesus returns  
every tear will be wiped away.

So the hope of something better can form another aspect of our healing,  
if not in this life, then certainly in the next.

You may not know that I have an interest in architecture.  
And as a minister religious architecture is something I'm aware of,  
and one thing I've noticed is that crematoriums have a particular design.  
You enter in via one door and then at the service's end you exit by another.  
The cynic within me says that this is simply an architecture of efficiency:  
If you bring them in one door and lead them out another  
then you can process more funerals that way.

But I find this design is also really symbolic.  
When they open the side door to let you out,  
if the door opens up onto a nicely manicured garden with the sun shining  
then I can't help but think of the new wonderful new chapter that we begin  
as we pass over into eternal life.  
And it's also symbolic for the people who've been left behind.  
Because they too are entering into a new chapter without their loved one.  
It's not easy, especially if there are relationships that need to be healed,  
But with God ministering to us by his word  
A ministry which, among other things,  
tells us of the eternal home that's being prepared for us,  
then that transition can be navigated and new chapters can be written.  
Job found this to be true, as we will too.  
Pray.