

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Story of Our Lives...and God

(Growing through Job's story)

Longing vs Demanding

(Examining Job's responses, part 1; Job, chapters 4-27)

Study #6

Introduction: Kicking 'em when they're down...

I hope that we would all consider it unsportsmanlike to “*run up the score*” or to “*kick an opponent when he's down*.”¹ That's ugly, but it has certainly happened that a winning team will keep on scoring against a hapless rival. For instance...

On October 7, 1916, Georgia Tech defeated the Cumberland College Bulldogs 22-0.² (By quarters, Georgia Tech 63, 63, 54, 42.)

In this game, neither team ever gained a first down. Georgia Tech's defense prevented Cumberland from advancing for a first down and Georgia Tech scored on every series of downs.

That was over a century ago, but it's happened recently, too.

On November 23, 1968, the University of Houston defeated the University of Tulsa, 100-6. They had a 24-0 advantage at half - and scored eleven touchdowns in the second half.

Then, also in 1968, the Ohio State Buckeyes, on the way to a national championship, defeated their bitter rival, the Michigan Wolverines, 50-14.

Late in the game, Ohio State held a commanding 44-14 advantage and scored one final touchdown. Rather than taking the more common extra point kick, head coach Woody Hayes opted for a two-point conversion, which was unsuccessful.

When asked later why he went for two points, Hayes is reported to have said, “*Because I couldn't go for three!*”³

All those stories are kinda funny...but sad. We think, “*That was cruel, kicking a team that is already down.*”

So, I'm warning you here at the outset that it may seem to you that I'm “*running up the score*” on our friend, Job. Now that he's down, I'm kicking him.

But wait. We need to take a good, long look at Job because how he behaves warns us of a grave danger we need to avoid.

Today, we're moving on after two weeks of listening to Job's friends and are putting Job under the microscope. His speeches give us a glimpse into what was going on inside Job - and it isn't pretty.

We're going to learn something today from Job about extreme discipleship and will consider a category of behavior you may not have thought about being a problem. We'll call it *demandingness*.

And, in case you haven't been with us for the whole Job journey, I'll take a minute to recap his story for you.

Review

³ In addition, in 1985, the University of Miami Hurricanes were playing Notre Dame. The Hurricanes, led by Coach Jimmy Johnson, called a fake punt on fourth-and-11 in the fourth quarter with a 44-7 lead and went on to win 58-7. And in the 1989 game in which the University of Houston played SMU (fresh off of its “death penalty” punishment from the NCAA for paying players) and won 95-21.

¹ There are rules in most youth sports leagues against this practice.

² Not long before this game, Cumberland had disbanded its football team. They quickly formed a scrub team when faced with fines if they refused to play.

Job lived roughly four thousand years ago. When we first met him, Job was a good man with a big, happy family. He was godly and healthy and wealthy. On one day, he lost it all.

His friends believed that he suffered these losses because he had done something wrong - but they were wrong.

What had happened was that God gave Satan permission to afflict Job. It was a test to see if Job would continue to worship and to serve God even if he suffered the loss of everything he held dear.

Satan said Job would fail. God said he would pass. Well, to this point in Job's story, we'd have to say that Job has done really well.

After his first trials he responded with:
**[1:21] Naked I came from my mother's womb
 And naked I shall return there.
 The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away,
 Blessed be the Name of the Lord.**

To which we say, "*Great job, Job!*"

Then, when he lost his health, Job still did not sin. He told his wife,⁴ **[2:10] "Shall we actually accept good from God and not accept adversity?"**

Another win for God and Job. Another loss for Satan.

He then retreated to the city's trash dump, where people with contagious diseases went to live in the ancient world.

Surrounded by three good friends, he poured out a desperate lament for all the trouble that had come upon him.

We'll chalk that lament up to another win for God and for Job.

Then, after silently sitting with him for seven days and seven nights, and after listening to his lament, his friends started talking.

⁴ She had advised him, "***Curse God and die!***" (Job 2:9)

The insensitive words of a friend...

The first of the friends to speak was Eliphaz. And to his grief-stricken, diseased, tortured friend he said,

**[4:7] "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent?
 Or where were the upright destroyed?"**

**[8] "According to what I have seen, those who plow wrongdoing
 And those who sow trouble harvest it."**

In other words, Eliphaz laid the blame for Job's suffering on Job. "*You brought this on yourself, buddy.*"⁵

Listen to Job's response and you'll hear transparency and vulnerability.

Round One: Job Longs for Compassion (Job 4-14)

"What a Friend Should Give a Friend" (6:14)

**[6:14] "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend;
 So that he does not abandon the fear of the Almighty."**

All Job does here is express his longing for his friends' kindness.

He was in shock at this tongue-lashing from Eliphaz. He probably felt like he had been slapped by a good friend for no reason.

His come-back is to simply say, "*Try a little tenderness, please.*" Job didn't leave God out of his response. He knew that life wasn't "*all about him.*"

The downstream reason for a friend extending kindness is SO THAT the despairing friend won't "***abandon the fear of the Almighty.***"

⁵ As many others have observed, "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." The friends held to a theology of retribution. Som every time they saw a nail of suffering, they applied, as a cause, the sin of the sufferer.

It is a good thing when friends come alongside suffering friends and provide kindness. And it's not a bad thing when a suffering friend expresses a longing for that kindness.

I would submit that it isn't a bad thing when a suffering friend admits disappointment that his friend has not given him the kindness he was longing for - as Job does here.

"I'm Really Disappointed" (6:15-18)

**[6:15] "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi,
Like the torrents of wadis which drain away,
[17] "When they dry up, they vanish,
When it is hot, they disappear from their place.**

A *wadi* is what we in Texas call an "occasional" stream. It occasionally flows (and it usually doesn't). Think about Culebra Creek and Leon Creek. These are *wadis*.

I've told you that one of my favorite places to go camping is Big Bend Ranch State Park, out in the desert of West Texas. It's dry out there, just like you'd expect in the desert. But there are oases.

And there's nothing more delightful than to be hiking along on a dry creek bed and to come upon a spot where the water bubbles up from underground and is flowing on the surface.

Sure. Thirty yards downstream the water disappears again. But that's a *wadi*. Unpredictable and - more to the point - undependable.

This is how Eliphaz' words have impacted Job.

Just when Job's parched soul could have really used a cool drink of comfort, Eliphaz speaks dry, dusty words. Job is hurt and disappointed. His hopes for kindness have been crushed.

He expressed that disappointment. It seems to me that there's nothing wrong with expressing disappointment over not receiving compassion.

Further, he expressed hope for better treatment. I find Job's courage to voice his hope for comfort inspiring.

"Please Help Me!" (6:24-30)

Openness to instruction (6:24-27)

**[6:24] "Teach me, and I will be silent;
And show me how I have done wrong.**

I hear openness to what his friends have to say. He isn't closed off from learning. He simply wants their kindness.

And he protests his innocence.

Asking for honesty and justice (6:28-30)

**[28] "Now please look at me,
And see if I am lying to your face.
[29] "Please turn away, let there be no injustice;
Turn away, my righteousness is still in it.
[30] "Is there injustice on my tongue?
Does my palate not discern disasters?"**

As he responds to his friends' first speeches, Job is respectfully pleading.

He just doesn't accept that he has done something to deserve the nightmare that his life has become.

However, toward the end of the first round of the debates - especially after Zophar's speech - we get the first hint of a subtle change in the tone of Job's words.

Among Zophar's less than gracious words were these:

**[11:2] "Shall a multitude of words go unanswered,
And a talkative man be acquitted?
[4] "For you have said, 'My teaching is pure,
And I am innocent in your eyes.'**

**[12] “An idiot will become intelligent
When a wild donkey is born a human.**

Job responded to that with sarcasm.

“You Have Failed Me” (12:1--13:13)

Nothing new here (12:1-3)

**[12:2] “Truly then you are the people,
And with you wisdom will die!**

**[3] “But I have intelligence as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.**

And who does not know such things as these?

**[13:2] “What you know I also know;
I am not inferior to you.**

Job’s insight is that Zophar’s insights aren’t very insightful. He already knew everything that Zophar had to say.

In fact, Job says that birds, beasts, and fish know as much as Zophar! (12:7-8)

And not only is there nothing new here. There’s nothing helpful in anything any of the three have said.

Listen carefully to Job’s words here and see if you don’t hear a sharp edge to his words. There is a growing bitterness of spirit.

Nothing helpful here (13:4ff)

**[4] “But you smear me with lies;
You are all worthless physicians.**

**[5] “O that you would be completely silent,
And that it (silence!) would become your wisdom!**

**[12] “Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes,
Your defenses are defenses of clay.**

[13] “Be silent before me so that I may speak;

Then let come upon me what may.

There. The first round of the speeches ends with Job astonished and hurt that his friends insist that he must in some way be responsible for his own sufferings.

He has pleaded with them for compassion - but they have given him only accusation and explanation.

I hope you never find yourself surrounded, at a time of grief and loss, with a modern-day version of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

I’ve spoken to enough suffering people to know that Job’s friends are still out there, looking for people to “help.”

I am sorry if Zophar has you in his sights. It’s miserable to have your thirst for compassion ignored. So, we get it. We feel for Job.

His friends’ failure to help at his time of need has made Job’s suffering worse than it was before.

Life would have been easier if his friends had offered him compassion and comfort. They haven’t, and now he has to deal with their insensitivity on top of his great losses.

But as the debates and speeches continue, Job moves from sadness and disappointment to something else. To something dangerous.

“I want...” has morphed into, “You better...”

An expression of **longing** has turned into a **demand**. He now **requires** that his friends come through for him.

From this point forward, getting his friends to respond to his pain the way he wants them to, becomes his obsession.⁶

⁶ Not only do we see a discernible downward spiral toward demandingness in chs. 5-27, each round of the debate displays progressive disillusionment over his three friends’ obstinacy as they demonstrate an inability to show comfort or compassion.

Round Two: Job is Obsessed with Finding Compassion (Job 15-21)

“You Haven’t Come Through for Me” (16:1ff)

The second speech of Eliphaz is a masterpiece of insensitivity.

In this speech (Job 15) Eliphaz accused Job of...
 ...being a windbag⁷ who speaks nonsense⁸ and irreverence.⁹
 ...arrogantly supposing that he is the only one around with wisdom.¹⁰
 ...foolishness for not accepting his own wise words.¹¹

Job responds to that.

[16:2] “I have heard many things like these;

Miserable comforters are you all.

[3] “Is there no end to windy words?

Or what provokes you that you answer?

[4] “I too could speak like you,

If only I were in your place.

I could compose words against you

And shake my head at you.

[5] “Or I could strengthen you with my mouth,

And the condolence of my lips could lessen your pain.

His message is not only that Eliphaz let him down. More than that, Job claims that if their positions were reversed, he would have done better for Eliphaz than Eliphaz has done for him.

Here’s what he says to all three of his friends.

“You’re All Fools!” (17:10)

**[17:10] “But come again all of you now,
 For I do not find a wise man among you.**

⁷ See Job 15:2?

⁸ See Job 15:3.

⁹ Job 15:4.

¹⁰ Job 15:7-10.

¹¹ Job 15:11.

Not only have they not been helpful. They have all been unhelpful fools. They haven’t suggested one plausible explanation for his suffering, not one thought that makes sense of his tragic life.

Job has now given up on trying to convince his friends of his innocence.

We hear bravado. We hear cynicism rising in his voice as he charges his friends with doing him harm.¹²

“You Have Done Me Dirty!” (19:1ff)

[2] “How long will you torment me

And crush me with words?

[3] “These ten times you have insulted me;

You are not ashamed to wrong me.¹³

The main message of Job to his friends in this second round of speeches is simple: “Be quiet!”

“If You Can’t Help - Be Quiet!”

[21:2] “Listen carefully to my speech,

And let this be your way of consolation.

[3a] “Bear with me that I may speak;

[5] “Look at me, and be astonished,

And put your hand over your mouth.¹⁴

These “*miserable comforters*” (16:2) haven’t done him any good - and he’s sick and tired of listening to them.

¹² From James Reitman: Job, now deeply wounded by his friends’ relentless insistence that he is guilty of sin, replies with escalating vindictiveness and closes with a decisive rebuttal of their theory of retribution, counter-indicting them for their own intransigent ill will toward him (chapter 21)

¹³ Consider the words of Job 19:21-22. His cry is for compassion from his friends.

¹⁴ Chapter 21 is a long address that ends with an accusation of empty comfort and false accusations from his friends.

**[21:34] “How then will you vainly comfort me,
 For your answers remain full of falsehood?”**

And, after listening to the “friends” we understand why Job lashed out. They did treat him badly. At times, in reading through these speeches, I’ve found myself cheering Job on.

The civility of the dialogue has been decreasing for some time. When we come to the third round of speeches, incivility is all that’s left.

Round Three: Job Demands Comfort (Job 22-27)

In his third and last speech, Eliphaz crossed a line and accused Job of terrible sins.

According to Eliphaz Job never lifted a finger to help a widow or an orphan, never supplied food to the hungry, abused the helpless, and denied justice to the weak - the exact opposite of the kind of life Job had actually lived!¹⁵

Now he and Bildad and Zophar have become Job’s enemies. They are no longer friends.

After Bildad’s short, final speech, Job addressed all three with this, again, dripping with sarcasm:

***[26:2] “What a help you are to the weak!
You have saved the arm without strength!
[3] “What advice you have given to one without wisdom!
What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!***

You can hear his scorn. And if you read what follows (chapter 27), you’ll find his bitter attitude bleeds through every word. He descends further and further into an angry tirade.

Job - blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil (1:1, 8) - is now as eager for God’s judgment of them as they have been eager for God’s judgment against him!¹⁶

And we, who know the back-story from chapters one and two, we who are “*in the loop*” about the heavenly wager, are increasingly uneasy with Job’s behavior.

The way he’s relating to his friends is contrary to the character of the man we met at the beginning.

We wonder if Satan is smiling, sensing a coming victory in the cosmic contest with God.

The tragic reality is that while it is true that Eliphaz crossed a line, so did Job.

In his pain, he lost sight of his calling to worship (“*fear the Lord*”), to be all about God’s purposes, and to love.

Conclusion:

Job has become something he never was before. He has turned into a “*friend*” who requires - not just desires - that his friends come through for him.

No longer is Job the God-centered, others-focused man in chapters 1 and 2. He has become an ugly demander.

So now I have piled on. I have run up the score on Job. I’ve kicked him when he was down.
Or have I...?

Let’s imagine that some Sunday morning here at church, as I am in the middle of a message, someone stands up, screams, knocks over chairs and runs out of the Worship Center.

He bumps into people and crashes through the door on his way into the lobby. He’s made a wreck of a worship service.

If that happened, we’d think poorly of this man. We’d think that he was rude and inappropriate.

¹⁵ Job 22:5-9.

¹⁶ Job sarcastically condemns his friends for their unhelpfulness (26:1ff)

But what if we were to find out that this man had suffered an acute case of appendicitis, or that he was in the process of passing a kidney stone when he stood up, screamed, and ran to the bathroom?

Our thoughts would immediately change because, after all, he was in pain.

All sorts of otherwise inappropriate behavior are excused when someone is in pain.

OK. Is Job excused from serving God's purposes, loving others, and trusting God because he is in pain? Am I? Are you?

When we are suffering the pain of disappointment because someone hasn't given to us what we want, are we excused from worship and service and love?

Well, if Job is our model, the answer is, "Yes."

He slammed his fist down on the table and demanded that his friends give him the compassion that he wanted, that he needed, that he deserved.

Today, I've made some very negative comments and have drawn negative conclusions about Job's behavior.

I'm saying that he moved from longing to demanding - and that he was wrong for having done so.

And why do I think it is right to see Job's example as negative? It's because Job isn't our example. Jesus is our Example.

Here, at the end (and before we take the bread and the cup of communion), we look to Jesus. He is our example, and He is the gold standard for God-centered, others-focused living.

At the moments of His greatest need, He was consistently abandoned by friends. Still, He did not demand that they come through for Him. Still, He kept leading a life of worship, love, and service.

- *On the road*

While walking toward Jerusalem, with the cross looming, Jesus would have cherished encouragement from His twelve friends. Instead, He got a demanding request from the Apostles James and John that they might have choice positions in Jesus' coming kingdom.

Jesus looked past His own desire for comfort from His friends. He spoke to the two brothers and to all of His disciples about servanthood.

- *In the Garden*

When He was arrested by Roman soldiers and Jewish priests in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus would have loved to have had His disciples stick around and endure hardship with Him. They all fled. So, He asked His opponents that His friends be protected and watched as those friends all left Him, alone with His enemies.¹⁷

- *On the cross*

While He was dying, Jesus would have been comforted to have received the gift of presence from all of His disciples. He didn't get that. No matter. He looked beyond His own physical and emotional and spiritual pain and spoke words of forgiveness to a penitent thief, words of love and care for His mother, and words of salvation to the world.

THAT is our calling. To hope for comfort, to long for compassion - but to never require it.

Longing is good. Desiring is human. Hoping is healthy.

We cross a line when we abandon our primary stewardship, which is to worship and to pray, to love and to serve.

Now, here's a friendly warning. To live without demanding that our friends come through for us will mean that we are choosing to live with a certain, core sadness. Our friends will not always come through for us.

But living with that sadness is far better than living as an angry, resentful, bitter spouse or friend, roommate or neighbor.

¹⁷ And this, after Peter, James, and John had failed to even remain awake when He asked them to "Watch and pray" as He prayed.

And we will learn that the pain involved in worshipping and loving while being sad will be more than balanced out by His grace and presence.

By faithfully living for Jesus while in pain, we bring a smile to the face of our Savior. We can be confident that we will one day hear, "*Well done!*," that we will be richly rewarded, and that we will reign with Him in His kingdom.

So, with joy we can and will follow in the steps of Jesus, who **[1 Peter 2:23] while being abusively insulted, He did not insult in return; while suffering, He did not threaten, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.**