

Bildad Misunderstands God's Justice

She has multiple myeloma," whispered Danielle, "and she's only 40 years old."

Danielle and Simone were in the church's fellowship hall talking about Davita, who had been asked to lead the new Bible study the ladies were doing.

"She's always acted so spiritual," continued Danielle. "I wonder how she's really coping? And her husband has been laid off. God must be trying to get her attention about something wrong in her life."

"She does try to paint a perfect picture whenever you talk to her," said Simone.

"She's covering up something!" Danielle said. "I wonder if she's confessed her hidden sins to pastor."

The two women looked across the room, watching Davita in a group of women, holding her Bible and a shopping bag.

"I wonder how they are going to make it financially," said Simone reservedly. "They have two children."

Simone and Danielle fell silent as they saw Davita approach their table. "Good morning, sisters," Davita said. "How are you doing? Danielle, I have something for you. You can look at them when you get home. If you don't want them, you can give them away."

When Davita walked away, Danielle pulled out a top. "No, she didn't give me her fat clothes!"

"Maybe she was just trying to be nice," said Simone.

1. *What are good and bad ways we sometimes respond to those who are suffering?*

2. *How do you think God wants us to respond?*

3. *What can be of help as we endeavor to do this?*

You Must Have Done Something Wrong

Job 8:1-7, KJV

1 Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said,

2 How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?

3 Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?

4 If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression;

5 If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty;

6 If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.

7 Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.

Job 8:1-7, NIV

¹Then Bildad the Shuhite replied:

²"How long will you say such things?

Your words are a blustering wind.

³Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?

⁴When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.

⁵But if you will seek God earnestly and plead with the Almighty, ⁶if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your prosperous state.

⁷Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be."

Job was a righteous man, but God nevertheless allowed Job to suffer at the hands of Satan, first by losing nearly everything he owned and cherished, and then by allowing him to be afflicted with painful sores. But Job refused to curse God or accuse Him of wrongdoing.

Three of Job's friends came to comfort him. But though they sympathized with Job, they wrongly contended that

he must have done something wrong and that he therefore deserved what was happening to him. The first to speak, Eliphaz, said that those who do evil will inevitably be punished, and Job must be suffering because of some sin he'd committed (4:1—5:27). Job insisted however that he was innocent of wrongdoing (6:1—7:21).

Then Bildad spoke, saying that Job's claim of innocence was without merit and that his words were like "a blustering wind" (8:2). To Bildad, Job's defense of himself was fruitless and his words would not be heard by God.

Bildad reminded Job that God does not pervert justice. He then cited what happened to Job's children as evidence that God does not act unjustly. It seems that Job's children spent a lot of time feasting (1:4-5), and Bildad presumed they did something God considered sinful. Consequently, the children died when a mighty wind caused where they were celebrating to collapse (1:18-19). Bildad was convinced that Job's suffering must therefore be God's just penalty for his sins as well, and the only thing that would end Job's misery and restore his fortunes would be to return to God and to live a pure and upright life.

4. *What did Bildad's response to Job's suffering indicate about his understanding of the link between sin and suffering?*

5. *What example did he cite to support this?*

6. *How did this affect his understanding of what Job needed to do if he wanted his health and fortunes to be restored?*

You Could Learn from Observation

Job 8:8-10, KJV

8 For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers:

9 (For we are but of

Job 8:8-10, NIV

⁸"Ask the former generation and find out what their ancestors learned,

⁹for we were born only yesterday

yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:)

10 Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?

and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow.

¹⁰Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?

To reinforce his conclusion that Job was suffering because of something he'd done wrong, Bildad urged Job to remember what former generations had learned about God's justice and the link between suffering and sin.

The tradition of ancient wisdom said that you always got what you deserved in life. If you were experiencing good things, it must be because you were living righteously. If you were suffering, it must be because you had sinned. Job may have believed this himself in relation to other people. Bildad pleaded with Job to give due attention to the lessons of their ancestors and evaluate his current predicament accordingly. So, the "understanding" (vs. 10) from the past that Bildad said would explain Job's suffering would simply repeat that Job was at fault and that was why he was suffering.

7. What did Bildad urge Job to take note of? For what purpose?

Your Path to Restoration

Job 8:20-22, KJV

20 Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers:

21 Till he fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing.

22 They that hate thee

Job 8:20-22, NIV

²⁰"Surely God does not reject one who is blameless or strengthen the hands of evildoers.

²¹He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy.

shall be clothed with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought.

²²Your enemies will be clothed in shame,
and the tents of the wicked
will be no more."

Bildad believed that God will not reject the blameless nor give strength to those who are evil. Since Job was suffering, God must be rejecting Job; therefore, he could not claim to be blameless. The only way Job could be forgiven and his fortunes restored was to acknowledge his sin and live a blameless life (8:5-7).

Bildad was wrong. He didn't know the actual reasons why Job was suffering. But he was right about one thing: Job's fortunes would be restored. However, Job's restoration would occur under circumstances that did not involve his confession of the sin he supposedly had.

What Job and his three friends did not understand is that people often suffer even though they have done nothing wrong. Those who are good may experience bad things in life; those who aren't may experience good things. Although it's true that some suffering is the result of sin and sometimes people are blessed because they've been good, at other times the opposite is true. As in Job's case, sometimes things are going on behind the scenes that are unknown or not well understood.

What Job was experiencing was not the result of some horrific sin he had done. And because of their faulty understanding of the link between sin and suffering, Job's friends unfairly and unjustly blamed Job. Sometimes we just don't know why people are suffering. And when we don't know, it's best not to claim that we do.

8. *What else did Bildad note to reinforce his belief about the connection between sin and suffering?*

9. *Even though Bildad was wrong about the cause of Job's suffering, what was he right about?*

10. *What lesson did Job and his friends need to learn?*

Sometimes We Just Don't Know

I once counseled two parents who were struggling to make sense of the death of their son who was born with a heart defect. They knew shortly after his birth that his life would lack in quality and years. Initially they accepted his prognosis and tried to make the best of it. But in the days following his death, they began to blame themselves for what happened to him, believing that this must be God's punishment for some sin they committed. Reminding them of what happened to Job helped them accept that the cause of their son's illness was unknown, so they had no basis for blaming themselves or others for it.

At another time, I counseled a father of two as he struggled to make sense of why his life was destined to be cut short by cancer. He said he'd been faithful to God and that he and his family had done their best to be obedient to Him. He insisted that he wasn't getting what he deserved. He began to doubt God's justice and questioned if his life-long devotion to Him had been worth the effort.

I reminded my friend that it's true that we don't always get what we think we deserve in life. Sometimes bad things happen to us even though we've lived an upright life; but sometimes good things happen even when we haven't been as good as God desires. What's important is to continue to trust in God and to remain faithful to Him even when life seems unfair or we are suffering through no fault of our own.

11. *What are ways you are sometimes inclined to respond when you or others are suffering?*

12. *What are some things you've learned as you've helped others deal with their suffering or in responding to your own?*

13. *What are some things you can and perhaps ought to do differently as you respond to times of personal suffering or as you help others respond to theirs?*

In Hindsight

Sometimes it's only when looking back that we understand why we or others are suffering or have suffered. That's why it's critical that we don't presume to know why someone is suffering when we often don't know. It's also important not to unfairly or unjustly blame ourselves or others.

Remaining faithful to God in the midst of suffering is often the key to understanding what is happening, even if that understanding only occurs in hindsight.

► *What can you do to respond more appropriately and constructively to someone who is suffering, even if the one suffering is you?*

KEY VERSE

Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind? — Job 8:1-2, KJV

Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind." — Job 8:1-2, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of February 21 through February 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 18:20-33—Abraham Pleads for Justice.
- Tue.** Psalm 37:1-11—Trust in God's Coming Justice.
- Wed.** Psalm 37:21-28, 34-40—The Lord Loves Justice.
- Thu.** Romans 14:13-23—Righteousness, Peace, and Joy.
- Fri.** Matthew 12:1-13—Jesus Demonstrates God's Justice.
- Sat.** Job 19:23-29—Job Cries Out for a Redeemer.
- Sun.** Job 42:1-6, 10-17—Job's Fortunes Are Restored.