



**Job thought he knew;
his friends thought they knew;
but none of them really understood
what the struggle was all about.**

Misunderstanding what

By MAXINE WILLIAMS

SHARD IN HAND, perplexed Job continued scraping. But the ache in his heart was worse than the pain in his flesh.

He had reached a dead end. He had searched his life and scrutinized his motives but could find no offense that would cause God to be so angry with him.

He had even tried that advice of more modern times: "When there's no way out, look up." He had called on God, without an answer.

Job's experience is like the experience of many of God's children today.

WITH FLYING COLORS

Following the initial disasters of the loss of his children and his riches, Job had accepted all the adversity as coming from the hand of God. He said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

Job didn't understand that the issue was whether God is to be worshiped for His own sake or for the sake of His blessings. In the presence of the whole council of the heavens, God had testified to Satan that Job

was perfect, upright, fearing God, and rejecting evil. Satan sought to disprove God's worth by attacking Job's integrity. He could not understand that a man would serve God only because God is worthy of allegiance and worship.

Nor did Job know that God had set limits to Satan. The latter had to get permission to afflict Job. He could go no farther than the bounds God had set.

Paul reiterated this principle for all believers when he said that no trial would be greater than we could bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The first trial vindicated God's trust. Job was sorrowing on earth, but God was filled with delight in Job's constancy.

NO END TO PERPLEXITY

Satan had declared Job's integrity lay in his well-being. Again he must ask permission to afflict Job. Again he was given permission but only within limits (Job 2:6).

It is not hard to understand why Job (or anyone) should fail to see God in this. He experienced such intolerable itching that his nails were insufficient and he had to scratch with a piece of broken pottery. He was so swollen and disfigured that his friends didn't recognize him (19:17-19). His sores were full of pus

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and maggots (7:5). His bones burned with fever (30:30), and his skin was discolored from his afflictions (30:28).

His question was that of many sufferers: Why is God so angry?

Finally his wife encouraged him to curse God and die. She used the word *barah*, which means "to renounce or turn away from." Unwittingly she had touched the very issue. Would Job renounce God because it appeared he was abandoned?

Job refused to turn away, but he did begin to lament. Like many sufferers he regretted that he was ever conceived; but, being conceived, he wished he had died at birth. Now he wondered why life was being prolonged in such a miserable state. He had no idea that in every day of continued faithfulness, God was rejoicing—not rejoicing in his suffering, but in his integrity.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT THEY KNEW

Throughout history it has been commonly believed that pain and suffering are the result of sin or disobedience, whether overt or hidden. Job's friends were no exception.

Eliphaz declared that despite Job's good reputation in the community, he *knew*, and he stoutly maintained that Job knew, that such things don't happen to good people. There had to be hidden sin.

He brought up the formulas that continue to be quoted to distraught sufferers: "You are reaping what you have sowed"; "You can't fool God."

He even declared he had had a revelation from God

God is doing

concerning this, and that what he had seen had made his hair stand on end (Job 4:15).

Through his past experience and his vision, Eliphaz was sure of his knowledge. But it wasn't true. He knew nothing of what God was really doing.

Then Eliphaz urged Job to repent. Poor Job! He would have been glad to repent had there been anything to repent of. He had searched fruitlessly.

Eliphaz applied more pressure: "You should be glad God is chastening you; He does it to save you."

The trouble was that Job too thought he was being chastened. He had always been taught that righteousness brings prosperity. Like many afflicted since those days, he cried out, "O God, am I some monster, that you never let me alone?" (Job 7:12, *Living Bible*).

The words of Eliphaz were true. God does judge the sinner; man must repent of wrongdoing. One cannot hide from God. But *their application as a reason for Job's suffering* was untrue. How much anguish of mind has been suffered because of truth misapplied through misunderstanding.

Eliphaz was very positive that everything would be all right if Job would only return to God. But Job had not left God, and he knew it.

A Jewish writer, Dr. Nahum N. Glatzer, points out

that the key to the Book of Job are the words *knowledge, wisdom, understanding*, and their derivatives. Each felt he knew. Each acted and reacted on the basis of his supposed knowledge. But none knew. Job's ordeal was not designed to uncover or punish hidden sin; it was to demonstrate the acceptability of Job and the greatness of his integrity.

If only Job could have known! But had he known, it would not have been a test.

Job longed to get through to God. He was sure it was all a misunderstanding. The more the friends accused him, the more desperate he became for vindication from God. If only he could make God understand! Once, in his agony he cried out, "Why won't you let me alone—even long enough to spit?" (Job 7:19, *Living Bible*).

Zophar continued the argument. But now it had become threadbare with repetition—the friends berating Job for hiding his sins, assuring him of deliverance upon repentance. Job too had exhausted his refutations. He had called without answer; he had nothing to confess. Everyone was worn out, and only anguish and darkness remained.

Job steadfastly declared God's greatness, and felt the problem was not God's character but a lack of true knowledge of the situation. By the time Elihu repeated the endless argument, there was nothing more to say, and Job said nothing.

UNDERSTANDING AT LAST

When God finally spoke, He had but one charge against Job. He didn't reprove Job for his complaining. He didn't accuse him of hidden sin. His charge was in the form of a question: "*Why are you using your ignorance to deny my providence?*" (Job 38:2, *Living Bible*).

That was the key to it all. The friends thought they knew. Job thought he knew. But God said they were ignorant of what He was doing. God laid low any earthly wisdom Job might have thought he had: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much." (See Job 38-41.)

God challenged Job with his lack of knowledge, showing conversely that God did know. And Job, who, like his friends, had so many times spoken of knowledge and wisdom, replied humbly: "I am nothing. . . I lay my hand upon my mouth in silence. I have said too much already. . . I was talking about things I knew nothing about and did not understand" (Job 40:4; 42:3, *Living Bible*).

We have no record that God ever told Job what it all had been about. He only said that *He does know*, and that *He is to be trusted*. The pain of heart had come from misunderstanding, from interpreting the experience according to human talk, human tradition, and human wisdom.

The trial had not been for Job nor against him. It had been for God's sake. It had declared to all the host of heaven, and to Satan, that a man serves God because He is God, and for that reason alone.

The trial had also taught Job one of the most valuable lessons of life: that peace of mind comes not through understanding what God is doing, but through knowing that He does understand, that He is totally trustworthy, and that He is worthy of worship for Himself alone.