



# THE BEREHA PAGE

*“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11*

## Ongoing Reflections

More than twenty years ago, I preached a sermon in which I detailed some of Job’s boldest statements, notably from Job 9-10, 12-13. To paraphrase one, “If I could, I’d take God to court over this, but since he would be the umpire, how fair would it be?” (see 9.33 RSV, NRSV). Afterward, a quiet sister I would not have suspected was pondering them said, “I appreciated that lesson. I didn’t think it was okay for us to ask those kinds of questions” (!).

Both academically and existentially, I have long had a personal interest in such questions. But my ongoing interest has also been prompted by responses like her’s that have proved to be the rule, not the exception, every time I have addressed the topic from various biblical texts. As Philip Yancey wrote with regard to some who “most shrilly” ask the hardest questions, “If our faith cannot answer them, then we have nothing to say to a broken world.”

~ *Where Is God When It Hurts?* 52

So, I added “dealing faithfully with trials and suffering” to the topics to address in this paper (Vol. 1/1) and pause my consideration of the line from thought to action (Vol. 2/5) to reflect on that theme this time.

## “I Want to Know Why!”

David Anguish

Among the most intense things I’ve ever read—and I’ve read and [reviewed](#) Elie Wiesel’s *Night*—is Philip Yancey’s account of touring Japan a year after the March 2011 tsunami. He saw mountains of debris: some 70 feet high; some comprised of crushed vehicles—among the 410,000 left in the wave’s wake. In one town, he saw a freighter, two-thirds as long as a football field, “beached on the concrete foundations of what used to be a residential area.” They had yet to “figure out how to get it back to the ocean half a mile away.”

He was in Japan to speak to groups on the theme, “where is God when it hurts?” In one gathering was a woman who described her distress with more passion than the unemotional stoic manner typical of the Japanese people. She told how, after being buried two days in a pile of rubble, she had grabbed the hand that finally reached down to pull her out and emerged to learn she had lost her family, friends, and town. “Please don’t forget us! They forgot me for days, now they forget my town. I want to know why!”<sup>1</sup>

Sufferers have asked the why questions for centuries. My formal pursuit of them began in 1976 when, as a 21-year old college student with a basic Christian Evidences course behind me, my roommate from the previous year was killed in a plane crash 38 days after his wedding. I’ve never forgotten the image of his distraught widow being helped from his grave—or the unsatisfying response to the why question offered at his funeral service.

In the ensuing years, I’ve read books, written papers, taken courses, taught classes, and preached sermons on the subject, not just to wrestle with the question personally, but to try to prepare others (or help some who had not or would not prepare) to cope with their inevitable crises.

Scripture doesn’t ignore the hard questions but includes

## More About Job

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 “Leslie D. Weatherhead . . . struggled with the specific question, ‘Why doesn’t God remove all pain from my life?’ To help him understand, he used a human analogy. Think of a physically strong man whose wife often complains because of mysterious ailments. After listening to her, the man gives in and begins helping her walk. After more complaints, he picks her up and carries her wherever she goes. Soon she is an invalid. She cannot take a step; she is totally dependent on him. In this case, it would have been far better for the woman if the man had stood back and watched her stumble, however painfully, to learn to walk on her own. Similarly, by allowing Job to walk on his own in the midst of pain, without the benefit of soothing answers, God let him acquire powerful new strength.”  
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“A God wise enough to rule the universe is wise enough to watch over his son Job, *regardless* of how things seem at the bleakest moments. A God wise enough to create me and the world I live in is wise enough to watch out for me.” ~ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 74, 84; citing Weatherhead, *Why Do Men Suffer?* (1935)

## Postmodern Lying Habits

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 1. Pride of Mind  
 2. Partitioning  
 3. People-Pleasing  
 4. Posturing  
 5. Prevarication  
 6. Power-plays  
 7. Personalizing

~ Os Guinness, *Time for Truth: Living in a World of Lies, Hype, & Spin* (Baker Books, 2000), 60-64

several examples of people who asked them, none more passionately than Job. His case is the standard, not because he found answers, but because he illustrates the path of faith when they are unfathomable.<sup>2</sup> Faced with God’s series of unanswerable and brusque questions (“‘Dress for action like a man’” - Job 38.3), righteous Job emerged at the end of his trial with the realization that he was seeing God better than he had seen him at its beginning: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (42.5; see 1.1-5; 42.7-8).

There’s more to learn from Job than what we glean from a common Sunday school telling that essentially settles for a summary of chapters 1 and 2 and then skips to 42.7. Most of the book consists of the sharp dialogue between Job and his friends wherein he was forced to defend his integrity against their baseless accusations. For example, Eliphaz alleged Job’s suffering was *prima facie* evidence he had done something terrible (see 4.5-7, 17; 5.17-20, 17). And Zophar rebuked what he saw as Job’s presumptuous declaration of innocence, insisting “that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves” (11.6). His advice? Just repent already (11.13-16, 20).

Job left no doubt about what he thought of their counsel. Since in their presumption to know what God would always do they had offered no comfort, Job sarcastically dismissed them (12.2; 13.4-12; 16.2). Oh, he understood their reasoning: his trials didn’t fit what he had been taught either (12.3-25; 13.1-2). So, more than once, he stated his desire to present his case directly to God—both to learn his offense (13.13, 23; also chapters 9-10) and to feel less estranged from God (13.24).

What do we learn from Job’s evolved faith that overcame his presumptions? First, absent a direct revelation, be reserved in saying what you are sure God is doing; sometimes suffering results directly from a person’s sin, but often it doesn’t. Second, be careful what you say when trying to comfort other sufferers. Third, feel free to genuinely and boldly go to God with your questions, frustrations, and feelings.

Finally, and most important, let God be God and seek to grow in your knowledge of him as he is.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Problem That Never Goes Away: What Is God Up To—Or Not—in a World of Such Tragedy and Pain?* Kindle (Brentwood, TN: Creative Trust Digital, 2013), Part 2: “I Want To Know Why.”

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that we who read the book have an advantage over Job in that there is no indication he was ever told the reason for his trials.

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