



THE BEREA PAGE

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

A “Word” on Happiness (and Suffering)

David Anguish

In his *Church Humor Newsletter* dated November 15, 2024, Drew Dyck notes the tendency of some to justify this or that course of action with “a word from the Lord.” He tells readers who would be concerned about it that, while he did not grow up in a charismatic tradition, he does believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, “including the gift of prophecy.” But, he continues, he has “been around long enough to know that some of the ‘words’ delivered by self-proclaimed prophets turn out to be a little . . . weird” (Dyck 2024; ellipsis his).

After noting “God told me we’re supposed to get married” and “God said to give me money,” he mentions the “word” and gives the response to it that prompts this reflection: “God just wants you to be happy.” Here is his elaboration on that affirmation and conclusion to the post:

This one’s a relief honestly. I’m just glad I don’t have to be like all those characters in the Bible who endured suffering and persecution. God has a different plan for me, probably because God loves me a little more.

Next time you hear some variation of the “words from God” above, I’d urge a little caution. You might want to open your Bible to get a second opinion (Dyck 2024).

Dyck’s observation reminds us that the Bible includes many examples of suffering servants and related comments about dealing with trouble. It never shies away from or dismisses the tough questions people have asked for centuries.

There’s Gideon, for example, who, when faced with an occupation of Israel by the Midianites, asked, “If the LORD is really with us, why has all this happened to us?” (Judg 6.13 NEB).

There’s Jeremiah who, when charged to warn Judah about coming destruction, asked God, “Why are you like a man taken by surprise? Why are you like a soldier who can’t save anyone? LORD, you are among us. And we are your people. Please don’t desert us!” (Jer 14.9 NIRV).

There’s David whose suffering at the hands of unscrupulous people was intensified by the mockery of those who should have expressed sympathy (Collins 2008, 963). In response, he wrote the poem that starts with the complaint, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning?” (Ps 22.1 CSB).

And yes, there’s Job. His case is classic, but not because he found all the answers to his big questions; so far as it’s revealed, he is never told the reason for his trials (cf. Job 38—41). No, it’s classic because his story demonstrates a course for faith in trials and shows what matters most when we suffer: not knowing God’s reasons, but seeing God (cf. Job 42.1–5).

But that’s not all Job shows. As he sought out the reasons for his troubles (loss of property, children, health, and support of his wife), debated his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and

then endured the angry and audacious Elihu's assertions about the matter, Job stuck with what he knew. For example, he protests his innocence and rejects Eliphaz's charge that he must have committed some hidden sin for which he was being called to account (cf. Job 4.2–4, 5–7, 17; 5.17–20, 27). He dismisses Zophar's accusation of presumptuousness, rejecting the contention that he should have "know[n] that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves" (11.6). He also rejects Zophar's claim that if Job will repent, relief will come, but if he continues to resist, his misery will be prolonged (11.13–16, 20).

Job will have none of it. He dismisses the misinformed theology and worthless counsel: "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you" (Job 12.2). "Miserable comforters are you all" (16.2b). They were preaching, but not listening; and in presuming to know what God would always do, they gave no comfort (13.4–12). Job acknowledges that he is a "laughingstock" (12.4), but will not yield in his conviction that his circumstances simply do not match the accepted wisdom that "everyone knows" (cf. 12.3–6; 13.1–2, 18). At the same time, he longs for a just hearing before God, to learn his error, and to find relief (9.32–33; 13.3, 10, 13, 15, 23–24).

If we have ears to hear, the experiences of Job and other sufferers in Scripture will remind us of some important realities as we cope with trouble and attempt to comfort other sufferers. I'll mention just four.

First, we must be realistic about what life entails—even for the most faithful. Dyck is right: people throughout Scripture had to endure trouble, suffering, and at times persecution. Who are we to think God will guarantee we are treated better than they were?

Second, absent a specific revelation, we must exercise restraint in declaring what God is doing in any given situation. Suffering sometimes results from sin. But often it doesn't. We won't always know why; for some trials, we may never know. Remember the adage: there's only one God, and neither you nor I are him.

Third, we must be wise in how we console others who are hurting. Our presence, a word of comfort, and/or a hug will nearly always suffice in the immediacy of the trial. Should more need to be said—and waiting for the troubled one to raise the issue is usually a good idea—stick to what God has revealed. Don't act as if you think "wisdom will die with you."

Fourth, both for the sake of those we comfort and our own, remember what Job learned and Jesus endorsed: what ultimately matters is seeing and knowing God (Job 42.5; John 17.3).

Works Cited

Drew Dyck. 2024. "God Told me To Tell You ..." *Church Humor Newsletter*. 15 November. Christianity Today.
C. John Collins. 2008. "Study Notes on Psalms." *The ESV Study Bible*. ed. Lane T. Dennis. Crossway Bibles.

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From my Essays, Papers, & Reviews page (link [here](#)), "The Happy Result of a Bad Experience" — My review of Gerald Sittser's book, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss* (link [here](#)).

Excerpt: "Though each person's loss is unique, Sittser's reflections give insight into what those who suffer experience. Though not exhaustive, his reflections on the philosophical and theological questions are well grounded and have the advantage of being worked out in the crucible of emotional pain."

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