

## **COMPASSION: THE FIRST RESPONSE TO A SUFFERING BROTHER**

*4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied, <sup>2</sup>If someone ventures to speak a word to you, will you be irritated? But who can keep from speaking? <sup>3</sup>Look; you have instructed many, and you have strengthened feeble hands. <sup>4</sup>Your words have helped the tottering to stand, and you have braced up those with shaking knees. <sup>5</sup>But now trouble has come to you, and you faint; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. <sup>6</sup>Should not your fear [of God] be your confidence? Is not the integrity of your ways your hope?*

*<sup>7</sup>Consider this: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? <sup>8</sup>According to what I have observed, it is those who plow evil and sow trouble who reap the same. <sup>9</sup>By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed. <sup>10</sup>The lion may roar, and the fierce lion may growl, but the young lion's teeth are broken! <sup>11</sup>The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the lioness's cubs are scattered.*

*<sup>12</sup>Almost imperceptibly, a word came to me; my ear caught just a whisper of it. <sup>13</sup>In the midst of disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep overtakes men, <sup>14</sup>fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shudder. <sup>15</sup>A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. <sup>16</sup>It stood still; but I could not tell what it was. A form was before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice. <sup>17</sup>It asked, Can a mortal be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? <sup>18</sup>[If God] puts no trust in his servants and charges his angels with folly, <sup>19</sup>how much more is this true of those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more easily than a moth? <sup>20</sup>Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces; unnoticed, they perish forever. <sup>21</sup>Are not the cords of their tent pulled up from them so that they die—and do so without wisdom?*

*5 Call now; but who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? <sup>2</sup>Surely, vexation kills a fool, and envy slays the simple. <sup>3</sup>I have seen a fool taking root; and I declared that his estate would be cursed, [doomed to] sudden destruction. <sup>4</sup>His children are far from safety; they are crushed in the court without a defender. <sup>5</sup>His harvest is devoured by the hungry—they take it from among the thorns, and the thirsty pants for his wealth.*

*<sup>6</sup>Hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground; <sup>7</sup>on the contrary, man gives birth to trouble, just as surely as sparks fly upward. <sup>8</sup>But if it were I, I would appeal to God; I would present my case to him. <sup>9</sup>He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed; miracles that cannot be counted. <sup>10</sup>He gives rain to the land; he sends water to the countryside. <sup>11</sup>He sets the lowly on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. <sup>12</sup>He thwarts the plots of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. <sup>13</sup>He captures the wise by their own shrewdness, and the counsel of the clever is swiftly brought to confusion. <sup>14</sup>Darkness comes upon them in the daytime; at noon they grope as in the night. <sup>15</sup>But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth; he saves them from the clutches of the powerful. <sup>16</sup>So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.*

*<sup>17</sup>Blessed is the man whom God corrects; therefore, do not reject the discipline of the Almighty. <sup>18</sup>He inflicts wounds, then he bandages them; he strikes, then his hands heal. <sup>19</sup>From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will touch you. <sup>20</sup>In famine he will redeem you from death, and in battle [he will deliver you] from the*

stroke of the sword. <sup>21</sup>You will be protected from the scourge [administered] by the tongue; and you will not need to fear when destruction comes. <sup>22</sup>You will laugh at the devastation caused by drought; and you will not need to fear the beasts of the earth. <sup>23</sup>You will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you. <sup>24</sup>You will know that all is well with your tent; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing. <sup>25</sup>You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants will be like the grass of the earth. <sup>26</sup>You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves of grain gathered in their season. <sup>27</sup>Listen; we have investigated this, and it is true; therefore, pay attention and apply these things to yourself.

**6** Then Job responded, <sup>2</sup>If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! <sup>3</sup>It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—that is why my words have been rash. <sup>4</sup>The arrows of the Almighty stick in me, my spirit drinks their poison; God's terrors are arrayed against me. <sup>5</sup>Does the wild donkey bray when it has grass, or does an ox bellow when it has fodder? <sup>6</sup>Is bland food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the white of an egg? <sup>7</sup>I refuse to taste it; such "food" makes me ill!

<sup>8</sup>O that my request were granted, that God would fulfill my hope, <sup>9</sup>namely, that God would be willing to crush me! May he release his grip and cut me off! <sup>10</sup>But this would still be my consolation—my joy in the midst of unrelenting pain—that I have not denied the words of the Holy One. <sup>11</sup>What strength do I have to keep on waiting? What is my future prospect, that I should be patient? <sup>12</sup>Do I have the strength of a stone? Is my flesh like bronze? <sup>13</sup>Is there any help left in me since wisdom has been driven from me?

<sup>14</sup>To him who is ready to faint, kindness should be shown by his friend; or else he might forsake the fear of the Almighty. <sup>15</sup>But my brothers are unreliable like a wadi: like wadis that overflow<sup>16</sup>when they are murky with ice and are swollen with [melted] snow. <sup>17</sup>But they cease to flow in the dry season, and when it is hot [the water] vanishes from their channels. <sup>18</sup>Caravans turn aside from their routes; they go up into the wasteland and perish. <sup>19</sup>The caravans of Tema look for the wadis; the traveling merchants of Sheba set their hope on them. <sup>20</sup>They are disappointed, because they had trusted in them; they come there, only to be confounded. <sup>21</sup>Now you, too, have proven to be of no help; you see something dreadful and you are afraid.

<sup>22</sup>Have I ever said, "Make a gift on my behalf, pay a ransom for me from your wealth"? <sup>23</sup>[Have I said], "Deliver me from the hand of my enemy, rescue me from the clutches of the ruthless"? <sup>24</sup>Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have erred. <sup>25</sup>How forceful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove? <sup>26</sup>Do you intend to rebuke my words, when the words of a despairing man [should be treated like] wind? <sup>27</sup>You would even cast lots for the fatherless and barter over your friend! <sup>28</sup>But now be so kind as to look at me. Surely I will not lie to your face. <sup>29</sup>Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my cause is righteous. <sup>30</sup>Is there any false testimony on my tongue? Can my palate not discern deceptive words?

**7** Is not man forced to labor on earth, and are not his days like the days of a hired laborer? <sup>2</sup>Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, <sup>3</sup>so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. <sup>4</sup>When I lie down I think, How long before I get up? The night drags on, and I toss until dawn. <sup>5</sup>My body is clothed with worms and clods of dirt;

*my skin forms scabs and then festers again. <sup>6</sup>My days pass swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope.*

*<sup>7</sup>Remember, [O God], that my life is a mere breath; my eyes will never see happiness again. <sup>8</sup>The eye that now sees me will soon see me no longer; you will look for me, but I shall be gone. <sup>9</sup>As a cloud fades and vanishes; likewise, he who descends into Sheol does not ascend again. <sup>10</sup>He will never again return to his house; his neighborhood will never see him again. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, I will not keep silent; I will speak from the anguish of my spirit, I will complain from the bitterness of my soul. <sup>12</sup>Am I the sea, or the sea monster, that you set a guard over me? <sup>13</sup>Whenever I think that my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, <sup>14</sup>even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions. <sup>15</sup>Therefore, my soul prefers strangling and death rather than these bones. <sup>16</sup>I despise [my life]; I would not want to live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are only a breath.*

*<sup>17</sup>What is man that you exalt him, that you pay such close attention to him, <sup>18</sup>that you examine him every morning, that you test him every moment? <sup>19</sup>Will you never look away from me? Will you not leave me alone long enough for me to swallow my saliva? <sup>20</sup>If I have sinned, how have I affected you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? <sup>21</sup>Why do you not pardon my transgression and forgive my iniquity? Soon I will lie down in the dust; then you will eagerly seek me, but I will be gone. (Job 4:1-7:21)*

## **Introduction**

When the First Responders rescue squad arrives at the scene of an accident, one of their first priorities is to make the victim as comfortable as possible. They seek to administer compassion and tender care to the accident victim.

In a similar way, when we encounter a Christian brother or sister who is experiencing deep and perhaps unintelligible suffering, we must treat them with great sensitivity and compassion.

We must not act like Eliphaz who callously counsels Job to let his "*fear [of God]*" (i.e.; his devotion to God) sustain him in his time of intense suffering (4:6.) To such counsel Job responds by pleading, "*To him who is ready to faint, kindness should be shown by his friend; or else he might forsake the fear of the Almighty*" (6:14.) What Job is saying is, I need your compassion, or else I may be tempted to forsake my fear of God!

## **I. Treat a Suffering Brother or Sister with Compassion, Rather than Seeking to Supply Pat Answers**

Eliphaz reminds Job that he has instructed and strengthened other in their times of distress; but now when he finds himself in distress he fails to heed his own counsel: Job should apply to himself the counsel he so often offered to others (4:1-5.)

Eliphaz reminds Job that he *“instructed many”* (4:3) and he admits, *“Your words have helped the tottering to stand, and you have braced up those with shaking knees”* (4:4.) But now when the situation is reversed and Job finds himself to be the one who is suffering, he faints and is dismayed (4:5.) One thing that is implied about Job’s counsel to others, the very thing Job himself now needs, and the thing Eliphaz fails to minister, is compassion: Job strengthened feeble hands (4:3), Job helped the tottering to stand (4:4a), Job braced up those with shaking knees (4:4b.)

Eliphaz’s advice is that Job should take confidence in the fact that the righteous are sustained while the wicked are overthrown (Job 4:6-11.) Job should be confident that, because of his devotion to God (his *“fear [of God]”* and his integrity,) God will take care of him and will bless him: God will come to his rescue (4:6.) Eliphaz reminds Job that it is not the innocent who perishes; rather, it is the ungodly who are cut off: *“those who plow evil and sow trouble”* are the ones who are consumed *“by the blast of [God’s] anger”* (4:7-9.) Eliphaz alludes to a familiar proverb to underscore the truth of his testimony: The fierce lion (depicting the proud evil doer) is rendered impotent and helpless by God (his teeth are broken), his ways are frustrated (he is deprived of his prey) and he comes to loss and humiliation (4:10-11.)

Eliphaz now goes on to report a vision he has received (4:12-21.) He describes the terrifying experience of having an encounter with a spiritual being (an angel as a messenger of God) in the middle of the night: *“A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up”* (4:12-16.) Eliphaz now relates the message communicated to him by this terrifying supernatural messenger: no mortal man can be righteous before God or be pure before his Maker (4:17-21.) The implication is that no man can dispute the way God deals with him; no man can claim that God is dealing unjustly with him; no man can maintain that because of his personal righteousness he deserves better treatment than what he is presently receiving from God. What is communicated here is the same doctrine as is taught in Romans 3:10 and Romans 3:23, as well as Psalm 143:2:

*There is no one righteous, not even one.* (Rom. 3:10)

*... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Rom. 3:23)

*Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.* (Psl. 143:2)

Note: This teaching, which deals with the sinfulness of man in the presence of God in absolute terms, is not to deny the relative righteousness of the godly man as he devotes himself to the LORD and keeps himself from great transgression (such is the case with Job.)

Based upon his vision, which stresses the sinfulness of man and the justice of God in absolute terms, Eliphaz now goes on to argue that whatever calamities are suffered in life are not capricious, but are infinitely just; therefore, it is foolish and sinful to become vexed against God (5:1-7.) There is no one who can come to Job's defense against God, neither man nor angel (5:1.) It is the fool who allows himself to become vexed and indignant against God; and he does so to his own destruction (5:2-5.) Eliphaz argues that affliction and trouble do not just sprout from the ground (5:6), i.e.; such things do not just happen, they are not capricious; neither are they just a part of the natural order of things. On the contrary, they are the just deserts of sinful man: *"man gives birth to trouble"* (5:7.) Eliphaz asserts that sinful man, by virtue of his character and conduct, produces trouble and deserves the consequences of just retribution.

Eliphaz counsels Job to cast himself upon God's mercy (5:8-16.) He assures Job of God's graciousness, as seen from the fact that He supplies rain for the earth (5:10-11.) He cautions Job that God sets Himself against the proud and those who adamantly set themselves against Him (5:12-14.) He reminds Job that God *"saves the needy ... from the clutches of the powerful"* (5:15-16.) If Job is willing to identify himself as one who is needy and if he will look to God for mercy, he can be assured that God will be gracious to him and deliver him.

Eliphaz exhorts Job not to reject the discipline of the Almighty (5:17-27.) Job should recognize his present afflictions to be the means by which God corrects and disciplines him, and he should humbly accept these afflictions as such for his ultimate benefit (5:17-18.) Eliphaz now enumerates the various calamities from which God will protect/deliver the man who trustingly submits to Him: famine, war, the scourge of the tongue (i.e.; slander and false accusations), the destructive storm, ferocious beasts (5:19-23.) Job is assured that the result of trusting submission to God's disciplining work will be the enjoyment of the blessings of peace and prosperity (5:24-27.)

So much—indeed, all—of what Eliphaz says is true. But he fails to appreciate that Job is not emotionally able to receive such instruction at this time. What Job stands in need of at this point is not counsel but sympathetic compassion. Furthermore, what Eliphaz says applies to someone who has departed from God and is harboring known sin in his life—Job does not fit that description.

Note Job's response to Eliphaz's speech as it is recorded in Job 6:14-30. He pleads with his friends to show him kindness and compassion; without their Christian compassion to uphold and sustain him, he fears that he is in jeopardy of abandoning his devotion to the LORD (6:14.) Job accuses his friends of betraying him in his time of need: he compares them to a wadi in the wilderness that dries up and thereby proves to be a bitter disappointment to the thirsty caravans (6:15-21.) Note: Their betrayal consists in their failure to minister kindness and compassion to him in his time of acute suffering. Job testifies that he asked nothing from his friends. He did not expect them to give him a gift from



their wealth, nor did he expect them to risk their lives to rescue him from a tyrannical warlord (6:22-23)—all he expected was that they would be sympathetic toward him and show him compassion.

Job now directly appeals to his friends to show him compassion (6:24-30.) He expresses his willingness to be instructed, he assures them that he does not possess an unreasonable, hardened attitude (6:24.) He seems to admit that his friends (through the speech of Eliphaz) have spoken "*honest words*" (i.e.; Eliphaz has spoken sound doctrine.) But the manner in which they have spoken those words is "*forceful*" (or, "*grievous,*" מְרִיץ) (6:25.) They have exhibited no tenderness or sympathy in addressing their friend in his time of suffering. His friends should realize that "*the words of a despairing man [should be treated like] wind*" (6:26.) That is to say, a man in his suffering and agony may say things he really does not mean, or things he has not clearly thought through, and therefore these friends should treat such a man accordingly. They should appreciate the circumstances under which the speech was uttered and perhaps even dismissing it, certainly not condemning the man for making such utterances in a time of great duress.

Job graphically describes the harsh, insensitive manner in which they have dealt with their suffering friend: they "*have cast lots for the fatherless*" (6:27.) Job is referring to the casting of lots to see who would claim the orphan child to be their slave—such is the callous attitude displayed by his friends. Job urges his friends, "*look at me*" (i.e.; to discern that he is a sincere man who is under great duress and therefore is to be pitied) and "*relent*" (the Hebrew verb, שׁוּב, meaning, "to turn," here it has the meaning, "to relent.") He pleads with them to change their attitude towards him from that of insensitive reprimand to that of sympathetic listening, for he assures them that his cause is righteous (6:28-30.)

Let us remember to treat a suffering brother or sister with compassion; rather than merely seeking to supply pat answers in an insensitive manner while exhibiting a callous or even judgmental attitude.

## **II. Treat a Suffering Brother or Sister with Compassion, Being Sensitive to the Depths of Their Agony**

Job declares that his anguish and his misery weigh down upon him with a weight that is greater than the sand of the seashore (6:1-3.) The heaviness of his anguish accounts for the rashness of his words.

Job portrays God as having set Himself against His servant as a mighty adversary (6:4.) Job's spirit is afflicted by the poisonous arrows shot at him by the Almighty—the terrors of God are set in array against him. The fact that God appears to be his adversary is especially grievous and inexplicable to Job, a man who has been devoted to the LORD and who has experienced the LORD's favor.

By means of rhetorical questions and more graphic images, Job expresses the anguish of his soul (6:5-7.) When the wild donkey and the ox have food they are content, it is when they are deprived of their necessary food that they cry out (6:5)—in the same way, Job, deprived of his former comforts and now experiencing intense agony of soul, mind, and body, cries out in emotional anguish. Bland food without spices is so distasteful that it is refused by the palette (6:6;) likewise, Job's present situation is impossible for him to "swallow," he cannot tolerate his present trials because they are so grievous to him. Note: Verse 7 may be translated, "*The things my soul refuses to touch, these things have become my repulsive food*"—i.e.; Job is forced to experience the very things from which he naturally recoils: loss of possessions, the death of loved ones, loss of health.

Job longs for relief, but it eludes him (7:1-4.) The servant earnestly desires the lengthening shadows that provide refreshing relief from the oppressive heat of the sun and signal the end of the work day (7:2a.) The laborer desires the hour when his work is ended and he receives his hard-earned wages (7:2b.) So, too, Job longs for relief from his excruciating trials. But, unlike the case of the servant or the laborer, the relief Job seeks eludes him. Instead of receiving a wage, Job experiences months of futility (or, emptiness); instead of the lengthening shadows bringing him relief, Job finds the nights to be wearisome and filled with anguish (7:3-4).

In addition to his intense emotional pain, Job finds himself afflicted with severe physical suffering (7:5.) In the morning light Job discovers that worms have bred in his sores. Hard scabs have crusted around the sores on his skin, only to break and ooze, leaving his skin painfully raw (Hartley, p. 145.)

Job now proceeds to give expression to his sense of hopelessness (7:6-10.) His life is swiftly passing away—with the speed of a weaver's shuttle as it flies back and forth across the loom (7:6.) At this point in his trial he has no hope that what awaits him at the end of his days is blessing; he entertains no hope of once again being restored to the earthly blessings he once enjoyed (7:7.) On the contrary, he anticipates a consciousness existence in Sheol (the place of the dead), from which place no one returns (7:8-10.) Note: The emphasis here is upon man's personal inability to return from the grave; at this time in redemptive history the doctrine of the resurrection was not comprehended with the same clarity as New Testament era believers possess.

In the light of Job's lament, let us remember to treat a suffering brother or sister with compassion; being sensitive to the depths of their agony.

### **III. Treat a Suffering Brother or Sister with Compassion, Recognizing Their Precarious Spiritual Condition**

Job has reached such a point of despair that he desires to die (6:8-9.) His request is that God would crush him (the Hebrew word, נִדְּבָה, has the meaning, “to be trampled to death”) and cut him off. At this point Job views death as his only escape from his excruciating pain (Hartley, p. 134.) Note that Job steadfastly maintains his innocence (6:10.) Indeed, it is the very fact of his innocence that causes his present trial to be so inexplicable—Why is he, an “innocent,” upright man who is devoted to the LORD, suffering the fate reserved for the ungodly?—and therefore so tormenting.

Job testifies that he has neither the strength nor the hope to endure (6:11-13.) Being a mere mortal, Job lacks the strength of stones or bronze—a strength that would make him impervious to any kind of suffering, be it physical or emotional (6:11-12.) At this point he lacks hope because he lacks understanding: wisdom has been driven from him (6:13.) He cannot comprehend why he, as an “innocent” man, is suffering at the hands of the Almighty; the apparent senselessness of his situation has robbed him of hope.

Job confesses that he is ready to faint; indeed, he is at the point where he is severely tempted to forsake the fear of the Almighty (6:14.) Due to his excruciating and seemingly unjustifiable suffering, Job is severely tempted to renounce his devotion to God—the very thing the devil desires for him to do.

Because of his present state of despair and hopelessness, Job is emboldened to raise a protest before God (7:11-16.) He utters the question that is gnawing at his soul, Why does God keep close guard over him? Does God view Job as if he were the sea monster that He must set a guard over him? (7:12.) Note: The sea and sea monsters were often viewed by the ancients as the symbols and the personification of cosmic evil. There is no comfort for Job, no respite from God’s assault against him; indeed, even his sleep, (which should provide peaceful rest,) becomes the occasion for terrifying visions from the Almighty (7:13-14.) Consequently, Job’s soul chooses death by strangulation rather than continued existence in his body. Thus, he pleads with God, *“Leave me alone”* (7:15-16.) His plea is that God would release him from life and thus cause him to die, because he feels that his days are *“[only] a breath,”* or, his days are *“[only] vanity”* (i.e.; his life is brief and meaningless.)

In almost a parody of Psalm 8, Job cries out, *“What is man that you exalt him, that you pay [such close] attention to him, <sup>18</sup>that you examine him every morning, that you test him every moment?”* (7:17-18.) The Psalmist stands in awe of the fact that God should single out man as the object of His special concern in all of His vast creation: *“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”* (Psl. 8:3-4.) Job, on the other hand, questions why God singles out man and makes him the special object of His divine scrutiny (7:17-18.) Instead of being a source of comfort, Job finds God’s



constant surveillance to be a source of oppression and terror. Job pleads for even a brief reprieve from the awesome divine scrutiny—at least long enough for him to take a swallow (7:19.)

With regard to the divine scrutiny that Job feels so acutely, he asks: If he is guilty of sin, what possible affect could his transgression have upon the Almighty? (7:20.) Or, If he is guilty of sin, why will God not have mercy upon him and pardon his transgression, seeing that his final destiny (as he believes in this moment of despair) is to come to oblivion in the grave? (7:21.)

In the light of Job's lament, let us remember to treat a suffering brother or sister with compassion; recognizing their precarious spiritual condition.

### **Conclusion**

We may well learn a lesson from the First Responders rescue squad: One of their first priorities is to demonstrate compassion and tender care to the accident victim.

In a similar way, when we encounter a fellow Christian brother or sister who is experiencing deep and perhaps unintelligible suffering, may we treat them with great sensitivity and compassion.