

July 28, 2019

The Life of Job  
*Good Fellows*  
Job 2:11-13

**Opening words:** Hidden in the Wisdom Literature section of the Old Testament is the Book of Job. The entire book is a poem, written by an unknown author. Alfred Lloyd Tennyson (1809-1862) called Job, "*The greatest poem of ancient or modern times.*" However, it is not just a poem. It is an epic poem. This type of literature is not intended to simply give us an account of a real character, but it is meant to teach divine truth. This poem teaches us about theodicy – the justice of God in the light of human suffering. Job is a rich theological work setting out a variety of perspectives. However, this is the bottom line: The Book of Job is universal. Everyone knows the basic storyline, and everyone can relate, because life is hard. I have called this entire body of work *The Life of Job*.

Jackie Robinson was the first black man to play major league baseball. Breaking baseball's color barrier, he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. The fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then, shortstop Pee Wee Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career. True friendship is a powerful thing. Today's message is about friendship. I have called this message *Good Fellows*.

**Job 2:11-13** When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads <sup>13</sup> Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

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Chuck Swindoll (born 1934) is a Christian evangelical pastor, educator and radio preacher. He founded Insight for Living, which airs on 2,000 radio stations in 15 different countries around the world. He once said, "*Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.*" I cannot disagree with that quote. It has become the quote for the entire series. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

Once again, we find ourselves in the second chapter of Job. Much has already happened. When our story began, Job had a good life. He was rich in resources and relationships. He feared God and shunned evil. He is the greatest man in the East. Even

God is impressed with him. That is when everything seemed to go wrong. God may have been impressed with Job, but not the Dark One. Satan is convinced Job's pious ways would pass once hardship entered his life. Sad but true, God grants Satan permission to test Job. The tests are not easy; they are hard. Over a short period of time, he loses everything. Job's money is gone. His oxen, donkeys and lambs are taken by foreign raiders, who killed most of the servants. His relationships are gone. All ten of his children are gone in an instant by a mighty wind from the wilderness, while partying at the eldest son's home. Even his good looks are gone. He is covered with painful boils from head to toe. He loses everything, except for his charming wife. She adds nothing to his life. Too bad the raiders didn't take her too! ☺. Thank goodness for his friends. That is who we look at today.

According to the text, Job had three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. There is nothing exceptional about them. They are simply remembered for their friendship. They hear about Job's hardships and decide to respond. They travel together to spend some time with him. They only bring one thing with them. It is not money or personal wisdom. The only thing they bring with them is their sympathy. Verse twelve tells us, when they saw Job in the distance, they did not recognize him. They are emotionally moved, and sit with Job for seven days, not saying a single word. Sometimes, silence is the wisest response. They are the embodiment of true friendship. If you have one true friend, then you have been given a great gift. Helen Keller (1880-1968) once said, *"Walking in the darkness with a friend is better than walking in the light alone."* I can't disagree with that quote. I am fortunate to have several good friends. If you are thankful you have at least one true friend, say, **"Amen!"** Let me state the obvious.

There is a world of difference between a friend and an acquaintance. Webster defines an acquaintance as, a person who knows someone slightly. Webster defines a friend as, a person you know and with whom you have a bond of mutual affection. Do you hear the difference? An acquaintance is someone you know. A friend is someone you like and respect. How many acquaintances do you have in your life? How many true friends do you have in your life? You may have many acquaintances in your life, but only a few friends. Job must have known many people, but Job only had three true friends. Let me give you an example.

The Canfield Fair returns in about a month. As county fairs go, it is the best. I like the Canfield Fair. My wife loves the Canfield Fair. She should be paid by the fair board for promoting it. She will go every day, so I will go every day. I don't mean from dawn until dusk. I mean we go every day for a few hours. As I walk around the Canfield fair with her, holding my lemon shake, french fries and sausage sandwich, I will run into people. I will say a few words to them and move on. Kathryn will always ask me the same question: How did you know that person? Every answer is different. Sometimes, I met them at a wedding. Sometimes, I met them at a funeral. Sometimes, they visited the church at some point, or they rented the church hall for some graduation party. In twenty-five years, I have met a lot of people. My children used to complain about

having to stop all the time at the Canfield Fair so I could talk to someone. I always said, "If I had a real job, we wouldn't be here at all." I am not unique in that way. We all have many acquaintances. I wish everyone had one true friend. My wife says part of the magic here is that everyone thinks they are my friend. She may be right. How many acquaintances do you have? How many true friends do you have? There is a world of difference between the two. The scripture for today is not about Job's acquaintances. It is about Job's friends.

This is not the only place in the Bible where friendship is mentioned. Friendships are not just mentioned in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Friendships are found in the entire Bible. Proverbs 17:17 says, "*A friend loves at all times.*" Consider these Biblical friends with me:

Jonathan and David  
Elijah and Elisha  
Paul and Timothy  
Ruth and Naomi  
Mark and Paul  
John and Jesus  
Moses and Aaron  
Abraham and Lot  
Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus

They were all friends. When I was in the Bluegrass State, my congregation could not sing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* enough. So, this is the question we must answer:

Why are friendships so important? Harvard University tells us solid friendships promote "brain health." I am not sure what that means, but I need all the "brain health" I can get. Mental health professionals tell us there are four important reasons why friends are important. Consider these with me.

1. **Friends encourage and support** – Friends are especially important in a time of crisis and turbulence. Your friends will get you through that transitional period.
2. **Friends will help your self-esteem** – Friends see the best in you.
3. **Friends keep you active** - In other words, your friends get you involved in the world. No one is meant to live on an island.
4. **Friends can be a positive influence** – We make friends with people we admire. They bring the best out of you.

If you will admit friends are important, say, "**Amen!**" If you have one friend say, "**Amen!**" Let me give you some pastoral advice. Don't ever take your friends for granted. They are extremely important.

It was the fall of 1975. I was an incoming freshman at Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio. It was a time of transition in my life. My high school days were over, and those

friendships were fading. My college days were beginning, and those friendships were being formed. I didn't know it then, but those friendships would become very valuable to me. One of those friendships was with a boy named Jim. He was a skinny, tall biology major from Hanoverton, Ohio. That friendship came easily. I am not uncomfortable saying that every moment with him was special. We were roommates during our sophomore year. That was when our friendships were forged. From the very beginning, we had differences of opinions. However, those opinions never really mattered. We respected one another and listened to what the other had to say. There were no secrets between us. There was no topic that was off limits. Countless times, he visited my family in Warren, meeting my extended family. Countless times, I visited his family farm in Hanoverton, and met his extended family.

When we graduated from college, I knew our friendship would endure. I am not saying we talked every day, but we stayed connected. I knew he was out there for me. I like to think he knew I was there for him. In time, we would both go into the ministry in the United Methodist Church, yet our careers took a different path. I found a home here, and he became the ultimate itinerant soldier. Through the years, he served churches in Hubbard, Canfield, Toronto, Shelby, Doylestown and New Philadelphia. For a six-year period, he served as a District Superintendent. He was professionally respected by many. I will be honest with you. I was proud of his success and he was proud of my longevity. I will never forget the day he told me he had decided to retire. He said, "Russ, 38 years is enough."

He decided to go home to retire, to Hanoverton. Kathryn and I were excited because he was going to be close. We dreamed of the things we were going to do together. He bought a small place on Guilford Lake, surrounded by his family. Kathryn and I were there several times. Once, he took us for a ride on his pontoon boat. Once, he took us out to dinner for our anniversary and it wasn't our anniversary. It was like a dream come true. We talked about him coming here to help me with visitation. When he told me he accepted another position, I was disappointed. Yet, I understood. I will never forget the day that he took Kathryn and me to the cemetery where his parents, Don and Elinor, were buried. It was on that trip he showed us where he was going to be buried. That day came too soon.

Six months into his retirement, he was visiting another friend in the Canton area. That was when the unthinkable happened. He was driving home to get ready for Christmas Eve, when he was in a horrible traffic accident. Several days later, Jim died. I have never had the emotional outpouring that some expected. It almost came as I wrote this message. Maybe the reason is I am still in denial? Maybe I decided to talk about his death because I am still wrestling with the truth. Jim is dead. On Memorial Day, Kathryn and I drove to visit Jim Humphrey's grave. He is buried next to his mother, as it should be. As I stood next to my friend's grave, I noticed how lonely this world truly is. Like Job, I have many acquaintances, but very few true friends. Can I ask you a personal question? How many true friends do you have? Don't take a one for granted. You will not know how valuable they are until they are gone.