

# Job's Perseverance

Impatience is characteristic of Australian 21st century culture. Our impatience permeates every sphere of life. We have a low tolerance for anything that inhibits or limits us on the road, at a checkout, our power being restored or waiting to use an ATM. The list goes on. In terms of any form of suffering, we just want it to end (i.e. euthanasia). Christians are to adopt a different mindset in the face of suffering. For most of us this runs counter-culture. Yet Jesus, the prophets and Job are held up as people whose patience in the face of suffering we are to imitate - see James 5:10-11.

Job's perseverance in the face of extreme suffering teaches us the wisdom of a person's total submission to God's will. The dialogue between Job and his counsellors shows the limited understanding we have of the origins of suffering and of God's purposes.

Often we are tempted to adopt a theological position to explain suffering. For example, Bildad is convinced that Job's children died for their sins and warns Job that he will receive the same fate unless he gets right with God (Job 8:4-6). Too often, like Job's advisors, our answer "represents a shallow and only partial observation of life; that is, man's suffering is always in proportion to his sins." The disciples also made this mistake [John 9:1-3].

As bad as these incorrect answers are, even crueler is the suggestion that the reason a person has not been healed is because of their lack of faith. Despite their faith, God chose not to heal Paul, Timothy and Trophimus (2 Corinthians 12:7-12; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20).

A facet of Job's suffering often overlooked is the fact God never abandoned him and directly speaks at length with Job. Although God describes himself as creator and sustainer of everything, yet he chooses to speak with Job as with a friend "not his enemy, as Job had imagined him to be." God's response to Job is described as "full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:11).

Job shows us that although we are "often sinful, weak, and ignorant, we can, like him, be relatively pure and upright even when in the midst of physical distress, emotional turmoil, and spiritual testing" (Job 13:18; 19:26).

Job's emotional instability arose from his internal conflict over the fantasy that God was unjustly punishing him for sins he had not committed (Job 9:21-24). Job realizes that "God does not need man's advice to control the world and that no extreme of suffering gives man the right to question God's wisdom or justice, and on this he repents (Job 42:2-6). After all his doubts and bitterness, Job arrived at that point of spiritual maturity where he could pray for those who abused him (Job 42:10; cf. Luke 6:28)."

Will we be an example of stout-hearted perseverance in the face of trying circumstances?