

Job 7:1-7

Dear Children of the Heavenly Father:

Do you have chronic pain? Many of our members do and it comes in all shapes and sizes: migraines, bad backs, arthritis. And then there is emotional pain: loneliness, depression, phobias. All that, of course, is just the tip of a gigantic iceberg.

The question of *why* Christians suffer, even though a loving God is ruling over them, has long perplexed us. The Book of Job is a classic study of this topic. It gives us a lot to think and pray about. Using Job's impassioned plea, today's theme is: **"Remember Me, O God!"** (1) *Give meaning to my life*, (2) *Change the meaning of my death*.

1

Job was a richly blessed man. People today might say he had the "ideal life." He's called ***"The greatest man among all the people of the East"*** (Job 1:3). But then, assaulted by the devil, Job lost it all: livestock, crops, children, health. He became of pathetic, wretched, lonely figure. Even his wife turned against him: ***"Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"*** (Job 2:9).

Three of Job's friends (*Eliphaz, Bildad, & Zophar*) came to talk to him about his problems. They said Job's sufferings are the result of some whopper of a sin he must have committed. If Job would just admit his sin and repent, his life would get better. The old phrase is, "With friends like that, who needs enemies!" They offered Job more condemnation than comfort. It made him even more miserable.

We ourselves need to be careful not to fall into this trap, thinking that chronic pain or suffering must be the result of some certain sin a person has committed and that now he or she is being punished for it. (Punishment for sin is hell, not earthly troubles.) Jesus' own **disciples** once fell for that mistaken idea. They saw a man who was blind and asked Jesus if that happened because of some particular sin his parents committed or some sin the blind man himself committed (John 9). Jesus told them they were wrong on both counts. Jesus said, ***"This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life"*** (Jn 9:3). Yes, sometimes we do knuckleheaded things and suffer the consequences of making bad decisions. But we **all humans** live under the curse of sin in our fallen world. Every trouble here is the result of the *curse that was announced on the world after the Fall of Adam and Eve in Eden*. As long as we live in the sinful world, believer and unbeliever alike will suffer pain, trouble, and sorrow.

After the poor theological advice given by his so-called friends, Job hangs in there. After his wife berated him, he said to her, ***"You're talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"*** (Job 2). But as the chronic pain lingers in his life, it takes its relentless toll. He says in our text, ***"Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me."*** Waiting to see if his pain would subside seemed interminably long! You can hear the futility in his voice as he laments, ***"When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss till dawn."*** By day Job longed for the night to come so he could get some rest; and then when night came he longed for morning to come because of his tormented sleepless tossing and turning.

Job feels like a **spectator** observing his own life, watching it deteriorate day after day. He is skin and bones. He has no appetite. And worst of all, he has **no control over what is happening!** In a much more minor way, how often haven't many of us felt that way when the doctor says, *"Well, you're not getting any younger. You're just going to have to learn to live with it."*

2

As Job suffers chronic pain, he starts to lose all sense of meaning and purpose in his life. It's like Solomon's words: ***"I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are mean-***

ingless, a chasing after the wind” (Eccl 1:14). Job’s faith slips toward despair. And yet Job still prays to God. He hasn’t given up. He prays: **“Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.”** Job is overwhelmed by his sense of “littleness” in a vast world and universe. He entered the world stamped “perishable item!” -- and now his expiration date seems closer than ever. **“My life is but a breath!”** he says.

It is now, in the throes of chronic suffering and on the precipice of a miserable death, that the Lord helps Job understand the meaning and purpose of his life. Job may have felt like a puny bug about to be squashed, but God was aware of Job’s plight, just like God was aware of the Israelites plight when they were enslaved in Egypt and their voices cried out to the Lord.

The Bible reminds us over and over that God knows us better than we know ourselves. David says in Ps. 139, **“Before a word is even on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord”** (v. 4). God also knows, then, our problems and, in particular, what’s at the **root** of all our problems: sin that infests our hearts and lives. Our sin is like a rogue virus or bacterium that eats the life from our souls. It’s a disease passed on by spiritual DNA from one generation to the next and has **no cure**....except one: Jesus.

Yes, Jesus. Jesus lived perfectly with you in mind. Jesus died on the cross with you in mind! If God loved us enough to give us Jesus and forgiveness and life in heaven, then he doesn’t **un-love us** when suffering comes. There *has to be another explanation* for our troubles. It can’t be that God hates us.

(1) James gives us one reason for Christian suffering: **“Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance”** (Jms 1:2). Suffering matures us. We learn from experience that even when times are tough God hasn’t abandoned us. His love in Christ is constant even when life’s wind direction is variable.

(2) Hebrews gives us another reason: **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”** (Heb 12:11). Suffering produces a crop. God grows compassionate, kind, considerate, loving Christians with the nutrients of daily trials. We often find that the most afflicted people are also the most caring and giving people.

(3) Isaiah gives us another benefit of troubles: **“Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction”** (Is 38:17). Suffering in this sinful world keeps us from getting too attached to it -- from becoming so engrossed in the stuff of this world that can destroy our faith and rob us of eternal life. It reminds us that what is yet to come is worth much more than what is now, and it’s absolutely worth waiting patiently for.

Eventually, this is what Job came to learn. There are days when life here seems to zip along just fine -- the sky is bright and everything is going our way. But then the clouds roll in and the storms hit hard. All these stormy trials lead us, yes, sometimes even force us, to **“number our days aright”** (Ps. 90:12) and remind us that life’s value comes from *outside* this world, *outside* the cycle of human birth and death. Life’s ultimate value comes from a God who graciously created us, but more importantly, who made you his own child *forever*, promising us heaven, through faith in the Lord Christ Jesus.

Amen.