

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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Miserable Comforters

Comforting the afflicted is a major component of our life of faith. But there is a right and wrong way to do it. Job's friends demonstrate how *not* to do comforting.

"Then Job answered and said: 'I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all!'" (Job 16:1-2).



Following the devastating tragedies that befell Job, his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came "to mourn with him, and to comfort him" (2:11). For seven days they sat with Job in silence, too overwhelmed with sorrow to speak (2:13). Once Job started opening up (ch. 3), the friends began to offer their condolences (ch. 4 onward). The bulk of the rest of the book is a dialog between Job and his friends about his misfortunes.

The friends would have done better to stay silent. Their "condolences" consisted of unfounded speculations about something in Job's private life that must have brought on this horrible turn of events. By chapter sixteen, Job had enough of their lecturing. They were "miserable comforters" whose counsel only added to his misery.

The story of how Job's friends dealt with his hardship serves as an object lesson in how *not* to comfort the afflicted.

Despite our good intentions, we can say the wrong thing that will only intensify the pain. Staying silent and letting the sufferer struggle alone is not an option; but we have to educate ourselves on the right and wrong way to go about this.

Job's friends made three mistakes that rendered them miserable comforters.

First, *they spoke from a faulty understanding of what was going on in Job's life*. They had no insight into the cosmic causes of Job's suffering. They could not peer into his heart to know the truth about the crimes they were accusing Job of having committed. Instead of approaching Job with compassion, they came at him with judgment. That condescending attitude only intensified Job's anguish.

Second, instead of giving comfort, *they presumed to fix a problem*. There is no question that some suffering is the result of foolish behaviors, and sometimes people need to learn a lesson from their poor decision-making. But as counselors, we must be very careful about taking on the role of critics when

helping someone cope with problems in their life. Some problems can't be fixed, and we're only insulting the pain of the sufferer when we make that our primary goal. People in grief first need comfort, not repair advice.

Finally, Job's friends were *motivated more by theology rather than by sympathy*. Their remarks were grounded in a broad (and incorrect) view of God and justice that blinded them to the reality of what was happening in this poor man's life. There is much about this world and how it functions that we simply don't understand. Sometimes the best we can do is admit our own ignorance and focus on easing the pain of those who are struggling. We should leave the deep thinking alone, and concentrate on being a friend to the one who needs it.

In the end, Job's friends served only as tools of Satan to intensify Job's suffering, not heal it. When we take on the role of comforting the afflicted (and we should!), we must take care to do it well. If our hearts are filled with the compassion of Jesus, we'll find the right words that will bring comfort.

— David King