

Job 4
March 8, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When someone is going through deep pain, what kind of words help the most? And on the flipside, what kinds of words can unintentionally hurt? [Let people engage – even well-intended theology can become harmful in real-life situations]

Transition: It's not easy to comfort someone who is suffering and not knowing what to say or if you should try to say anything. The last thing we want to do is unintentionally be insensitive, or say the wrong thing, or not be aware of their emotional needs in the moment. We all want to get it right!

Eliphaz is one of three of Job's friends who decides to respond to Job's lament. To give Eliphaz the benefit of the doubt, I'm going to assume that he wanted to respond appropriately, but as we will soon see, he doesn't. It's a swing and a miss! There is a danger from "assuming" we understand why someone else is suffering. Let's read the text and see what we can learn from it.

BOOK:

4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied:
2 "If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?
But who can keep from speaking?
3 Think how you have instructed many,
how you have strengthened feeble hands.
4 Your words have supported those who stumbled;
you have strengthened faltering knees.
5 But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;
it strikes you, and you are dismayed.
6 Should not your piety be your confidence
and your blameless ways your hope?
7 "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?
Where were the upright ever destroyed?
8 As I have observed, those who plow evil
and those who sow trouble reap it.
9 At the breath of God they are destroyed;
at the blast of his anger they perish.
10 The lions may roar and growl,
yet the teeth of the great lions are broken.
11 The lion perishes for lack of prey,
and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.
12 "A word was secretly brought to me,
my ears caught a whisper of it.
13 Amid disquieting dreams in the night,

when deep sleep falls on men,
14 fear and trembling seized me
and made all my bones shake.
15 A spirit glided past my face,
and the hair on my body stood on end.
16 It stopped,
but I could not tell what it was.
A form stood before my eyes,
and I heard a hushed voice:
17 ‘Can a mortal be more righteous than God?
Can a man be more pure than his Maker?
18 If God places no trust in his servants,
if he charges his angels with error,
19 how much more those who live in houses of clay,
whose foundations are in the dust,
who are crushed more readily than a moth!
20 Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces;
unnoticed, they perish forever.
21 Are not the cords of their tent pulled up,
so that they die without wisdom?’

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We need to be careful when explaining someone else’s suffering. Eliphaz assumed that Job’s suffering must have come from personal sin. Let’s avoid quickly concluding that someone’s suffering is punishment from God. Real-life situations are often more complex.

Second, good theology can be misapplied. Eliphaz says things that are true, e.g. God is just, and people reap what they sow. However, he wrongly applied this principle to Job’s situation. So even correct spiritual principles can become harmful when we apply them rigidly or without understanding the situation.

The bottom line is that **listening and empathy** are often more powerful than analysis. And if we decide to speak, it should be with **humility**, recognizing we may not understand everything God is doing.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Job 4)*. Victor Books.

I. Job's Accusers

Job's three friends came to comfort him, but they ended up criticizing him! Each of them used the same argument in one way or another: (1) God blesses the righteous and afflicts the wicked; (2) God has afflicted Job; (3) therefore, Job must be wicked. Of course, their thinking seemed logical, but it was not spiritual. Mortal human beings are far too ignorant to understand fully the ways of God. For us to fit God into our own little "theological boxes" is to limit Him and make Him less than God. We must keep in mind that these friends did not have the full revelation that we have in the NT, showing more fully that suffering is not always caused by sin, and that, through our faith in Christ, we can turn suffering into glory. It is a dangerous thing for believers to "explain the ways of God" to other believers if they do not understand God's Word and God's ways.

In his first speech, Eliphaz argues that Job is a sinner (4:7–11). He bases his thinking on a special vision he once experienced (4:12–21), so we might say that Eliphaz argues from personal experience—the hard "facts of life." Bildad picks up the argument in 8:1–7 and very bluntly states that God does not do things unjustly. In 8:8–10, Bildad argues from tradition, and then quotes a series of "old sayings" to support his argument. *Zophar* rebukes Job in chapter 11 and tells him he needs to repent and get right with God! All three "friends" make the same mistakes: (1) they fail to enter into Job's sorrows and sympathize with him; (2) they have a rigid concept of God and His works, one that is not fully true; and (3) they are too dogmatic and proud to listen to Job and honestly examine their own beliefs.

The problem of human suffering is too deep and complex for the simple answers the three friends gave. Jesus never sinned, yet He suffered more than any person! Neither Job nor his friends knew about the conference in heaven, that God was using Job as "Exhibit A" before Satan and the angels to prove that people will trust God even when they do not understand what God is doing. The friends called Job a "hypocrite" (8:13; 15:34; 20:5; 34:30); God called him "a perfect and an upright man" (1:8; 2:3). Job would not bargain with God just to regain his material prosperity, for his greatest asset was his personal integrity.

In 2:3 God makes it clear that He had no cause for afflicting Job, that Job was not a hypocrite or a sinner. This is why God rejected the speech of Elihu (38:1–2) and the speeches of the three men (42:7).

Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 725-726) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. Eliphaz's first speech (chaps. 4–5)

a. *His rebuke of Job (4:1–6)*

4:1–2. Aware that Job’s solo tirade (chap. 3) had been an impatient outburst against his troubles, **Eliphaz**, probably the eldest of the three (cf. comments on 2:11), feared that any words he could speak might be met by Job with a similar or stronger impetuosity. So he asked, **If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?** Eliphaz felt he had to take the risk and speak. He could not let Job get by with such an affront to the Almighty.

4:3–5. Eliphaz commended Job for having **instructed ... strengthened**, and **supported** others emotionally and spiritually by his **words** of counsel. But that compliment contained a rebuke, for Eliphaz suggested that Job was unable to take his own medicine. He had advised others to be patient under trial, **but now trouble** had come to him and he was **discouraged**. In fact calamity struck (the same word Satan used in 1:11 and 2:5) and Job was **dismayed** (lit., “terrified, in panic”; also used in 21:6; 22:10; 23:15–16). Job had been a great encourager, but he could not encourage himself. Eliphaz failed to realize that one who is suffering cannot easily encourage himself; Eliphaz should have been the one to encourage Job!

4:6. Eliphaz then asked, **Should not your piety** (related to the word “feared,” 1:1) **be your confidence, and your blameless ways** (lit., “the integrity [cf. ‘blameless,’ 1:1] of your ways,” NASB) **your hope?** Perhaps this was a tongue-in-cheek rebuke of Job for his lack of confidence because he was no longer fearing God. Or possibly it was a reminder that because Job had had reverence for God in the past he could also trust Him now. Later, however, Eliphaz questioned Job’s “piety” (reverence, 15:4).

b. *His reasoning about suffering (4:7–11)*

4:7–9. Eliphaz then presented his theory on suffering: the **innocent** never perish (cf. “perished,” “perishes,” and “perish” in vv. 7, 11, 20); the **upright** (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3) are not **destroyed**; but **those who plow evil and ... sow trouble** (*‘āmāl*; cf. 3:10) will also harvest trouble (cf. Prov. 22:8; Hosea 8:7; 10:13), and the wicked **perish** under God’s **anger**. Such a theory, however, simply does not fit all the facts. Many times the innocent *do* suffer (e.g., Luke 13:4–5; John 9:1–3; 1 Peter 2:19–20), and often the wicked seemingly have no problems. This was Job’s point throughout the book; Eliphaz’s view of an airtight doctrine of retribution does not jibe with reality.

Eliphaz’s authority for his theory was what he himself had seen in his lifetime (**as I have observed**, Job 4:8; cf. 5:3; 15:17). Inherent in this authority base, however, is a flaw: his observations, though undoubtedly extensive, were not universal. Bildad’s authority was history (“Ask the former generations,” 8:8), supposedly a broader base than the observations of one man. Zophar, blunt, discourteous, and dogmatic, merely assumed that what he said was true, without trying to back his statements up with some other authority.

4:10–11. Eliphaz added that though **lions** are strong, their **teeth** can be **broken**, they can perish **for lack of** food, and their **cubs** can be **scattered** by a hunter. Similarly, this senior spokesman hinted, Job, who used to be strong (cf. vv. 3–4), was broken and his children lost. **Lions** (five different Heb. words are used for “lion” in vv. 10–11) deserve to suffer because they bring problems to people; so Job also deserved to suffer.

c. *His report of a vision (4:12–21)*

4:12–16. Eliphaz sought to add authority to his theological viewpoint by relating his experience as if it had occurred in **dreams**. Though some might challenge his limited observations, who could prove his dreams wrong? **A word was secretly** spoken in **a whisper** (cf. v. 16) to him in his dreams. In his fright his **bones** shook and his **hair ... stood** straight up. The **spirit** (v. 15), an indistinct **form** (v. 16), must have been unusually disturbing as he saw it pass by, then stop, remain quiet, and whisper.

4:17–21. Apparently, the words Eliphaz claimed he heard in his dream are given in these verses. For three reasons it is doubtful that the words were a revelation from God: (a) “a word” (v. 12), not “a word of the Lord,” came to Eliphaz; (b) the word came “secretly” (i.e., in an elusive manner, v. 12); and (c) the message seemed to picture God as unconcerned about man (vv. 17–21).

Can a mortal be more righteous than God? “Mortal” renders *’ēnôš*, “weak, mortal, man”; this word is used 30 times in Job. **Can a man** (*geber*, “strong man”) **be more pure than his Maker?** (“Maker” also is used in 9:9; 32:22; 35:10; 36:3; 40:19.) Scholars differ on how to translate the Hebrew word “from” in the literal phrases “from God” and “from his Maker.” One rendering makes it comparative (as in the KJV and NIV): “more righteous than God,” “more pure than his Maker.” Another is suggested by the NASB: “before God,” “before his Maker.” Either way, Eliphaz implied a negative answer: Man cannot be righteous and clean before God (and certainly not more so than God). God does not **trust ... His servants** (angels) and **He charges His angels** (i.e., fallen angels and Satan) **with error**. Therefore man certainly cannot be trusted.

Eliphaz pictured people’s mortality in several ways: They **live in** mere perishable **houses made of clay**, built on **dust**; they are **crushed more easily than a moth**; they are **broken to pieces like a vessel** and their **tent cords are pulled up**. People perish, dying **unnoticed and without wisdom** (to die without ever finding wisdom was the ultimate disaster for someone in the East). These words from the friend-turned-antagonist are a not-so-subtle attack on Job. His houses were not secure; he was scattered (materially) like a moth easily crushed between one’s fingers; his life was disrupted and unsettled (like a tent toppling over with no tent cord to hold it up; cf. 5:24; 8:22; 15:34). Job obviously was not a wise person, according to Eliphaz. This dream-report was given to support his theory of suffering: Job was suffering because he was a sinner. What Eliphaz apparently failed to consider is the fact that if all people, being unjust and impure, suffer, he would be included too!

Garrett, D. A. (1998). *The Poetic and Wisdom Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 205). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Eliphaz’s First Response (4:1–5:27). Eliphaz tried to persuade Job that the world’s moral order was still stable. God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Eliphaz claimed that both experience and a private revelation supported his case. He asserted that humans are such lowly and foolish creatures that their lives are naturally full of trouble. Still, he urged Job to call upon God, who would hear and help. Ironically, this happened, though not in the way Eliphaz supposed.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 4). Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan.**

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