

A Life Gone Awry

*In the land of Uz, there was a
blameless and upright man named Job,
who feared God and avoided evil.*

THE BOOK OF JOB 1:1

For people who have experienced a catastrophic illness, trauma, or accident and are still racked with horrible pain, life “before” often takes on a rosy hue, as if everything had been perfect. Life “after” becomes a hated ordeal that we resent all the more because it takes us further away from our Edenic life “before.”

As our problems and pain increase, we may draw an even greater distinction between “before” and “after.” Not only was our life better “before,” but the world around us was better, too. Loved ones didn’t have annoying habits. Work wasn’t onerous at all. Traffic flowed. Life was one big vacation.

Or was it?

Although there were many good things about our lives before pain, there were many not-so-good things, too. No one is perfect. We are, after all, human, and being human means that there will be good and bad, joyful and painful times throughout.

It's no accident (pardon the pun) that The Book of Job begins with his "life before." The writer wanted us to see Job as someone who appeared to do everything correctly and was reaping great rewards. In the first verse of chapter 1, we meet a man who not only enjoys the respect of his community, but who also is a man of faith. We meet someone "blameless and upright," and very wealthy. Besides his seven sons and three daughters, Job's livestock was so numerous that "he was greater than any of the men of the East" (Job 1:3).

There are people like this today, people, perhaps in your church, who, on the surface, seem to have everything going for them. Fine car. Beautiful family. Honored position within the congregation. Money with which to buy nice things and tithe abundantly.

Perfect?

Remember, these people who exude prosperity are human, too. As we learn from Job, no one's life is completely perfect.

[Job's sons] used to take turns giving feasts, sending invitations to their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when each feast had run its course, Job would send for them and sanctify them, rising early and offering holocausts for every one of them. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and blasphemed God in their hearts." This Job did habitually.

✠ JOB 1:4-5

Although Job lived honorably, it would appear that his children were eager party-goers, and perhaps worse.

How perfect could Job's life be if his children did not seem to share his faith and observance of temperance?

How perfect could Job himself be, if he seemed, in our modern-day terminology, to be an "enabler," someone who cleaned up the mess his children made, without holding them accountable for it?

I can imagine this concerned father fretting over the exploits of his sons by night and hurrying to offer holocausts the next day so that

God would not be angry with them. Today, we see this same behavior in our own homes and in society at large. The mother who refuses to admit to a child's drug use. The father who consistently bails out his child financially. The friend who turns a blind eye to another's sexual promiscuity.

In a way, we might say that Job's first failing was to deny the pain around him and in his life, and try to keep up appearances with his community and with God.

The conversation between God and Satan puts this in clearer terms: God applauds Job for being so devout, but Satan argues that Job is that way simply because God has made Job's life so easy.

[Satan tells God,] "You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock are spread over the land. But now put forth your hand and touch anything that he has and surely he will blaspheme you to your face." ✿ JOB 1:10-11

No life is completely bereft of good things. In fact, sometimes when we are in great pain, we place extra emphasis and attention on those things that bring us even a little happiness.

- Do you recognize the good things in your life?
- Do you take them for granted?
- Have you ever said, "I'd fall apart if I ever lost _____"?
- Are your affections for things justified?

