

The Reason That We Can Affirm the Life

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It was when I was still in elementary school that I first encountered the book of Job. I was captivated by its opening chapters, particularly the description of Job's incredible hardships. Here was a man who had done nothing overtly wrong, yet he found himself subjected to devastating trials. In my youthful innocence, I approached my father and excitedly expressed my desire to read the entire book, anticipating a narrative similar to a Disney cartoon where a good person faces challenges only to triumph in the end.

To my surprise, my father's response was quite different. "Well, the book of Job isn't all that fun," he said. At that moment, I didn't grasp the weight of his words. I was unaware that the latter portions of the book delve into bitter arguments, profound despair, and the unsettling reality that life often presents us with incomprehensible hardships. As I grew older, I learned that Job's story resonates with many of us, echoing our own struggles and the existential questions we face in moments of pain.

Today, we delve into the reasons we can affirm life amidst our trials, guided by Job's unwavering integrity and the message of Jesus in the book of Hebrews. Together, these texts invite us to explore the complexities of suffering while also revealing the hope and grace that sustain us.

Job's story serves as a stark reminder that suffering is a universal experience. In his plight, we see a reflection of our own struggles. Job was a righteous man, known for his integrity and devotion to God. Yet, without warning, he faced a series of catastrophic events that stripped away his wealth, his health, and ultimately his family. The dialogue between God and Satan is pivotal, revealing the underlying assumption that faithfulness is contingent upon earthly blessings.

"Skin for skin!" Satan argues, suggesting that people will do anything to protect their lives. This sentiment resonates deeply in our contemporary society, where we often measure our worth by our possessions, our status, or our successes. When life throws us into the depths of despair, we may find ourselves questioning our faith, much like Job did.

In Job's experience, we also see the profound loneliness that can accompany suffering. Despite his integrity and faithfulness, he found himself isolated, sitting in ashes, scraping his painful sores with a potsherd. This imagery vividly illustrates the rawness of human suffering—the kind that goes beyond physical pain to touch the very essence of our being. Job's affliction is not just about the loss of material possessions or health; it encompasses a deep emotional and spiritual turmoil. His friends, who come to comfort him, instead engage in futile debates, attempting to rationalize his suffering rather than simply being present with him in his pain.

His wife's despair leads her to urge him to curse God and die, a response borne from her own anguish and the sense of hopelessness that suffering can bring. She, too, has lost everything and feels trapped in a reality that defies understanding. Yet, in this moment of darkness, Job's reply is profound: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

Job's words challenge us to confront the duality of our experiences. They compel us to reconsider how we view our lives, especially in moments of suffering. Job acknowledges that life is not merely a series of rewards and punishments but a complex journey woven with both joy and suffering. In doing so, he calls into question the belief that faith is transactional—that if we follow the rules, good things will happen to us. Instead, he invites us to see faith as a steadfast commitment to God, regardless of our circumstances.

This perspective can be liberating. It opens up the possibility that suffering does not negate our faith; rather, it can deepen it. When we encounter pain and hardship, we are often faced with choices that can either lead us toward bitterness or toward growth. Job's unwavering integrity in the face of his trials exemplifies the potential for faith to flourish even in the harshest conditions.

Moreover, Job's story speaks to the struggle many face in our own lives when we experience loss or hardship. The modern world often emphasizes self-sufficiency, prompting us to hide our struggles and wear masks of strength. However, Job's candid expression of his suffering reminds us that vulnerability is a part of the human experience.

As we reflect on Job's story, we are invited to confront our own struggles with honesty and grace. Instead of viewing suffering as a punishment, we can learn to see it as an integral part of our journey, shaping our character and leading us toward greater compassion and understanding. This perspective allows us to affirm life even amidst our trials, recognizing that, like Job, we have the capacity to endure and to emerge transformed.

In this light, let us approach our hardships with the same resilience and faithfulness that Job exemplified. As we navigate the complexities of our own lives, we can find hope in the assurance that our struggles do not diminish our worth but rather contribute to the richness of our shared human experience.

As we shift our focus to the book of Hebrews, we discover a transformative perspective on suffering. Hebrews 2:9-12 presents Jesus as one who shared in our humanity, enduring suffering to bring many to glory. This passage profoundly assures us that our struggles do not separate us from God. Rather, they draw us closer to Him.

The author highlights that Jesus, made lower than the angels for a little while, tasted death for everyone. This pivotal act of love reveals that Jesus not only understands our pain but also willingly enters into it. The suffering Jesus experienced serves as a pathway to our own redemption. By facing death and overcoming it, Jesus invites us to see our suffering through the lens of hope.

In the context of suffering, Jesus stands with us. He is not a distant figure; He is intimately acquainted with our struggles. Hebrews asserts that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. This is a remarkable invitation to relationship, reminding us that we belong to a family united by shared experiences and a common Savior.

Even amidst our struggles, we should seek joy in our lives. One of the essential moments of joy is found in sharing food. Food has a unique power to bring people together, foster community, and create moments of celebration.

Eating together is not merely a physical act; it is a profound expression of our humanity and a moment of connection. Jesus recognized this and demonstrated it physically, particularly among the marginalized.

Jesus dined with tax collectors, sinners, and outcasts, showing us that His grace knows no boundaries. In doing so, He modeled radical hospitality, breaking social norms to invite everyone to the table. By sharing meals with those whom society often rejected, He demonstrated that every person has inherent worth and dignity. The act of sharing a meal becomes a tangible expression of love, acceptance, and community.

As we partake in the bread and the cup during Holy Communion, we remember that we are all recipients of God's grace—unworthy yet fully embraced. This sacred meal is a reminder that, in Christ, we find a place at the table, regardless of our past mistakes or present struggles. It is an invitation to experience the fullness of life, reminding us that, just as Jesus shared meals with the marginalized, we too are called to extend grace and love to those around us.

The table becomes a powerful symbol of affirmation in our lives. It reminds us that we are not alone in our suffering; we belong to a community where we can share our joys and sorrows alike. It invites us to embrace our interconnectedness and to recognize that every person, regardless of their circumstances, deserves a place at the table.

As we share in the Lord's Supper on this World Communion Sunday, let us reflect on the beauty of this shared experience. In this act of communion, we affirm that life is a journey marked by both suffering and joy, and we commit ourselves to walk alongside one another as we navigate these complexities. Just as Job's story calls us to confront our struggles, the table calls us to celebrate our shared humanity.

In conclusion, let us carry the lessons from Job's story and the example of Jesus into our lives. May we embrace our struggles, find joy in shared moments, and extend radical hospitality to all. Let us affirm life in all its fullness, knowing that we are all welcome at the table, united by grace and love. Amen.