

I Am a Man Who Has Seen Affliction

(A Scriptural Primer on Suffering)

By Nathan Warner

“He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely against me He has turned His hand repeatedly all the day.”

(Lamentations 3:2-3 NASB)

“For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty.” (Job 6:14)

God has given us two very detailed, first-hand accounts of suffering in His Word—Job and Lamentations. The words of Job and Jeremiah are some of the hardest to read in all of Scripture. Why did God see fit to include them in His Word?

God has given them to us for a reason—to better understand our own afflictions and the sufferings of others. God wants us to know that He understands, so that in our suffering, we might have hope through these harrowing testimonies and have compassion and kindness toward others suffering. God wants us to show, and be shown, patience, grace, love, and kindness in the trials and tribulations of life. Suffering and affliction are not pretty, but unlike the gods of false religion, our God does not ignore it nor explain it away. And He wants us to know through these testimonies that He will see us through.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO SUFFERING?

As a whole, Believers in America seem to have a particularly poor understanding of Christian suffering. Some of their common responses to afflicted Christians are as follows: “Well, you must have sin in your life and this is discipline – pray that God will reveal your sin to you,” or “you need to have more faith – faith moves mountains – if you have enough faith God will do anything you ask,” or “you need to do X or Y – it worked for me, so it will work for you, too,” or “read this book and follow the 5, 6, or 12 steps to healing and prosperity – it will change your life,” and, if that doesn’t work, “you obviously aren’t invested in the formula for success – try harder” or “okay, so that book didn’t help – read this other teacher’s book and follow his/her steps to happiness – you just have to find what works for you.” And so on and so forth.

Sound familiar? These are modern echoes of the advice Job’s so-called friends gave him when he underwent extreme affliction. None of these words are kindness to the despairing Believer. All of these things make “you” the focal point of what is happening in your life. They are all different ways to say, “you caused your affliction” or “you have the power to overcome your affliction.” This has more in common with the religion of karma than Christ. Karma is the idea that if you do good, good will come to you – and if you do bad, your life will be bad. It is the idea that you reap what you sow: good things come to good people and bad things come to bad people.

ARE WE JOB’S FRIENDS?

Many a Christian today would nod in agreement with that swell guy Eliphaz when he told

Job, “Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (Job 5:17). Here, Eliphaz is suggesting that Job was experiencing the Lord’s discipline for some sin he MUST HAVE committed, and he should be glad God cares enough about him to discipline him.

Next up, Zophar spends chapter 11 telling Job, “You deserve worse.” This is true spiritually—we all deserve worse for our sin—Zophar, Eliphaz, and Bildad also! So how is this encouraging or kind to someone suffering? You could add here this common “encourage-ment” offered by people: “Well, at least you’re not worse off—just think how much worse your situation could be and then you’ll see it isn’t that bad.” There are always others who suffer more, but does that mean we should “put up or shut up”? Of course not.

Job’s friend Bildad jumped onboard the shaming of Job by suggesting that God rewards the good; therefore, Job couldn’t be in the right because God had stopped rewarding him: “Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity, nor will He support the evildoers” (Job 8:20). “If you would seek God and implore the compassion of the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely now He would rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate” (Job 8:5-6). Bildad was preaching the prosperity gospel—that if Job would just “get himself right with God,” life would be great again. It is true from an eternity perspective that God WILL judge the wicked and reward the just in the age to come, but we know that in the present world, God gives rain to the just and unjust, and prosperity and success are no measures of integrity. Job answers as much.

Eliphaz took his position further to suggest that Job’s affliction was judgment from God – because in his heart, Job must truly be a bad man. Eliphaz then proceeded to invent fanciful reasons why Job was being judged: “Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you, that He enters into judgment against you? Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities without end? For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause, and stripped men naked. To the weary you have given no water to drink, and from the hungry you have withheld bread....Therefore snares surround you, and sudden dread terrifies you, or darkness, so that you cannot see, and an abundance of water covers you....Yield now and be at peace with Him; Thereby good will come to you” (Job 22:4-7, 10-11, 21).

Eliphaz is saying, “Job, clearly you’ve done something really awful to deserve what is happening to you. Just admit this is why you’re being punished and God will restore you.”

None of this was the right way to handle Job’s affliction, and we’ll see that God was not pleased with their “encouragement.”

WHEN SHOULD WE ADDRESS SIN?

Is there a right time to suggest someone’s affliction is judgment for sinful behavior—or that they are responsible for their situation? Yes. When the sin is open and clearly connected to the affliction. For example, if a Christian has an outburst of anger, physically assaults someone, and ends up in the hospital with serious injuries, this “affliction” is a direct result of sin. Similarly, if someone is sexually promiscuous and gets a disease, this “affliction” is a direct result of their sinful behavior: “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:15-16), “for it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong” (1 Peter 3:17). We are told not to bless people in their sin: “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin” (1 Timothy 5:22).

Where there is no open sin, however, we probably shouldn't be suggesting to the afflicted that their actions could be the cause of their situation. Unfortunately, we are often guilty of telling the afflicted, "Well, you probably should have done X or Y, and because you didn't, you're in this fix." That is not kindness or compassion—it's self-righteous judgment.

And this is Job's struggle, for he is not suffering for being a murderer or thief or even for some small sin—he is suffering as a follower of God. He could not understand why, and he would not accept the lie that he had done something to cause it—even if that would have made peace with his friends.

THE PROBLEM WITH JOB'S FRIENDS

Many of us have said things like Job's friends to afflicted Believers. But we do not want to be in this camp with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. God was very angry with them for their self-righteous handling of Job's utter helplessness and despair rather than offering him kindness and empathy. *"It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has'"* (Job 42:7).

Why was God angry with Job's friends? Because without knowledge of God's purpose, they judged both Him and Job. Unbeknownst to them, God Himself had appointed for Job to endure affliction for eternal glory – the affliction WAS unjust but not by God's hands – satan's unjust hands were trying to destroy Job in a fallen, unjust world, which had been made that way by satan's hand.

SUFFERING IS UNCOMFORTABLE

Suffering is dismaying! Job's friends were dismayed at his suffering and affliction! This is normal. But the problem lies with what you attribute as the cause of someone's suffering.

Like Job's friends, we don't like suffering, and we Americans even seem to have a special aversion to it. We often prefer to explain it away – sweeping it under our theological rugs so that it won't disrupt our tidy understanding that everyone is entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And if someone hasn't attained this, then it's their own fault for not trying hard enough. There is an attitude that life is good and opportunity is yours for the taking if you just make the right decisions. This is all "you"-focused, not God-focused.

Suffering is uncomfortable for us, partly because it reveals the ugliness of the fallen nature around us that we try so hard to beautify, cover up, and ignore. And people experiencing affliction are like those pesky Prophets who wouldn't let people live in their comfortable theological constructions but kept chipping away at them with inconvenient truth.

For the sake of discussion, let's define "prophets" loosely here as people who have been touched by God (or their situation) to reveal truth to them in such a way that they cannot keep up the façade that everything is okay with the world.

Even if the afflicted don't speak the truth that has touched them, their very affliction speaks to it. And that truth is invariably that everything in the world is not "okay." This world is a mess – it has always been a mess (since the Fall), and it will continue going from mess to mess until Jesus returns. The afflicted testify to the reality of a fallen world, which is not intended for our happiness or fulfillment but to drive us to the only one who can fulfill us – Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the coming King, Who will restore our natures to righteousness and the nature of this

world to perfection.

“For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:19-21)

Job experienced the futility of creation. He groaned and suffered in that pain and would not pretend that everything was okay. He wrestled with what was happening to him and he wrestled with God. He testified to man’s fallen estate and injustice. But notice that this made Job’s friends uncomfortable. Eliphaz went so far as to suggest in Job 15 that Job did not fear God because he was struggling with what God was allowing. Job’s friends wanted to shift the discussion to make it about him rather than the reality of the fallen life and the nature of God.

Yet through all his struggles with the nature of God, Job never lost sight of Him, declaring, *“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!”* (Job 19:25-27) *“But it is still my consolation, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One”* (Job 6:10).

Perhaps Job’s friends were afraid to think that Job’s fate could befall any of them for no apparent reason. So, to make themselves feel better, they resolved that Job’s affliction had to be because he had done something to deserve it or that he just needed to do x, y, or z to raise himself up. Eventually, God made the real reason apparent to Job – it was, indeed, because of the Fall of nature, but beyond that, it was the first sinner, satan, who was responsible for Job’s affliction and the injustice he experienced—he was being persecuted by satan—tried and tested for an eternal glory. But it took an agonizing 42 chapters for God to explain this to Job.

JEREMIAH’S BURDEN

Job was touched by reality and he spoke about it, as did many of the Prophets. For Jeremiah, being a prophet meant God touching him in such a way that he could understand the depravity of all men in the face of God’s holiness. He was given the eyes to see that everything was not “okay.” In response to this knowledge, he could not remain silent or wear a smile when he went out among the people. He had a burden of understanding that God gave him, and he had to share it, regardless of whether anyone wanted to hear it or not – he was commanded to!

Jeremiah was to *“roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and look now and take note. And seek in her open squares, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, then I will pardon her”* (Jeremiah 5:1). He saw that *“‘out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,’ declares the Lord; ‘and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah. I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and*

worshiped the works of their own hands” (Jeremiah 1:14b-16).

How did the Israelites respond to this? Did they listen to the warnings? No. It made them uncomfortable. They ignored it: *“You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you”* (Jeremiah 7:27).

Ignoring someone is like abandoning them – it is getting away from them to distance yourself from the discomfort they cause. They ignored Jeremiah, but they couldn’t get away from him, and he wouldn’t go away. He just wouldn’t shut up so they finally began answering him but with attacks: *“Then they said, ‘Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike at him with our tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words’”* (Jeremiah 18:18).

So, they began to silence him with their words. They started out basically saying, “Why are you trying to ruin our fun, Jeremiah? You’re such a downer! Life is good and no judgment will befall us!”

But Jeremiah wouldn’t shut up and keep it to himself. So, finally, they tried to silence him: *“Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the Lord”* (Jeremiah 20:2).

Jeremiah struggled with the fallen nature he saw all around him, but he also struggled with God’s response to that fallen nature – terrible judgement. The judgement was so terrible, it broke Jeremiah and he shared that brokenness in Lamentations.

Not unlike Jeremiah, Christians who go through affliction are touched by those circumstances to personally know “everything” is not okay. Like Job and Jeremiah, they intimately wrestle with the fallen nature and God’s nature. The reality of a fallen world has touched their lives. Sometimes it is with such force that they despair.

We need to be careful how we respond to our brothers and sisters who are suffering and experiencing affliction. We shouldn’t ignore them, abandon them, lecture them, preach at them, or strike out at them with our tongues.

Job was right that *“for the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty”* (Job 6:14). Kindness, empathy, and presence from friends and family are what helps the Believer despairing in his or her affliction – not words of correction, theological sermonizing, testimonies about other people suffering, testimonies about how others were restored, or self-help and “fix it” approaches. We need to show the nature of God: lovingkindness.

THE DESPAIRING BELIEVER

When a Believer is struggling with reality and God’s nature, it can be terrifying for the immature Believer because it is where the flesh meets the fire. It is painful, and those going through it often question God’s purpose, His character, and His point. This can be very frightening to witness. Job struggled this way: *“For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, their poison my spirit drinks; The terrors of God are arrayed against me”* (Job 6:4).

“Know then that God has wronged me and has closed His net around me. Behold, I cry, ‘Violence!’ but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and He has put darkness on my paths. He has stripped my honor from me and removed the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am

gone; And He has uprooted my hope like a tree. He has also kindled His anger against me and considered me as His enemy. His troops come together, and build up their way against me and camp around my tent.” (Job 19:6-12)

“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or the sea monster, that You set a guard over me? If I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, My couch will ease my complaint,’ then You frighten me with dreams and terrify me by visions; So that my soul would choose suffocation, death rather than my pains. I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath.” (Job 7:11-16)

Was God angry with Job for expressing these emotions? No. God wasn't angry with Job but with Job's friends—and they were out to defend God's name to Job! You see, God understands our suffering. He knows that the despairing, like Job, *“speak in the anguish of my spirit...and complain in the bitterness of my soul”* (Job 7:11b). Even Job admitted that *“the words of one in despair belong to the wind”* (Job 6:26b).

Sometimes we need to be heard. We need others to understand our emotions. We may not even mean what we say, but the pain is real! Our words may be reprovably, but our emotions are not—they are the cry of our human frailty. And reproof, correction, or judgment are not empathetic but the badges of self-righteous people who cannot empathize.

God sympathizes with the afflicted and the despairing. He knows that suffering is an immense burden, one which cuts us down.

Like Job, Jeremiah also said some truly terrifying things through his ordeal:

“I am the man who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath. He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely against me He has turned His hand repeatedly all the day. He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away, He has broken my bones. He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship. In dark places He has made me dwell, like those who have long been dead. He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He is to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in secret places. He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces; He has made me desolate. He bent His bow and set me as a target for the arrow. He made the arrows of His quiver to enter into my inward parts. I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their mocking song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust. My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, ‘My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord.’” (Lamentations 3:1-18)

Pretty intense, isn't it? How would you react to your Christian Brother or Sister saying this? Would you correct them or chide them or explain that they must have done something wrong to deserve it or tell them that they should just do this or that to make it all better? Most of us would probably be tempted to say something along those lines. But that's a job for Job's friends, not us.

THE NEED FOR JUSTICE

Justice is very important to those enduring affliction and suffering, regardless if it is justice from God for the persecutions of men or justice from God for the persecutions of satan. We hold onto truth and justice in the face of the injustice of our situation.

“But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue with God...Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him...Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be vindicated.” (Job 13:3, 15, 18)

“My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird; They have silenced me in the pit and have placed a stone on me. Waters flowed over my head; I said, ‘I am cut off!’ I called on Your name, O Lord, out of the lowest pit. You have heard my voice, ‘Do not hide Your ear from my prayer for relief, from my cry for help.’ You drew near when I called on You; You said, ‘Do not fear!’ O Lord, You have pleaded my soul’s cause; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen my oppression; Judge my case.” (Lamentations 3:52-59)

WHEN GOD IS NOT COMFORTING

Believers undergoing affliction often go through times when the things of God are no comfort to them. They have difficulty praying, singing hymns, and being in God’s Word. Why is that?

In the midst of his terrible experience, Job understood that regardless of his prayers for mercy and help, God “*will complete what He appoints for me, and many such things are in His mind. Therefore I am terrified at His presence; when I consider, I am in dread of Him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me*” (Job 23:14-16 ESV), for “*when I hoped for good, evil came, and when I waited for light, darkness came. My inward parts are in turmoil and never still; days of affliction come to meet me*” (Job 30:26-27).

It truly is one of the hardest struggles in life to pray for good and receive harm, as if in answer to your prayers. It knocks the wind right out of you and is one of the most evil persecutions satan can devise for the Believer.

We need to take care to not add harm to Believers by judging them in this.

ABANDONED BY GOD?

In addition to this, there is often a fear among those suffering that what is happening to them is a sign that they have been abandoned by God—even if they know in their minds that this can’t be the case, physically and emotionally, it is not so clear: “*Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked*”

(Lamentations 3:8-9 NASB). “*If I called and He answered me, I could not believe that He was listening to my voice. For He bruises me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not allow me to get my breath, But saturates me with bitterness*” (Job 9:16-18).

The Scriptures that promise God will never abandon us can be small comfort in the moment of affliction and silence when we feel abandoned. In this way, some people undergoing affliction have difficulty engaging with Believers who speak of the goodness of God and how faithful He has been to them. It is as if salt is being rubbed into their raw wounds.

ABANDONED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

A more tangible abandonment comes from our “friends” and family. There is often a falling away of people from those going through a trial or affliction. Even non-Believers testify to the fact that their “friends” vanish when they go through hardship. Job experienced this, as he declares, “*My relatives have failed, and my intimate friends have forgotten me*” (Job 19:14). It is truly terrifying when all the people you thought cared about you, melt away from you because your affliction makes them uncomfortable. Of course, it is even worse if they won’t leave you alone and continually blame you for your situation, like Job’s three friends.

COUNTERPOINT: PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SUFFERING

Some will ask, “Are you suggesting we just wallow in our suffering, feeling sorry for ourselves?” Self-pity is our natural reaction to affliction, and it is understandable, especially when our suffering is acute or “out of proportion” to expectation. But we should be honest in our assessment of our situation and not blow things out of proportion. And we should seek God when we are able.

Even in Job’s anger and anguish, he earnestly desired to argue his case with God. And when the time was right, God told him: “*Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!*” (Job 38:3) Affliction can bring things to a head. You may start out angry at life or yourself, but ultimately, you may be forced to face the fact that you are angry with God. This is where our anger ultimately must go, for everything ends in God. Wrestling with God is certainly better than shutting Him out in anger and self-righteous self-pity. Like Jacob, whose name “Israel” literally means, “he who struggles with God,” we wrestle with God all our lives but most fervently in our afflictions.

“*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*” (Luke 22:31-32). Like Peter, our temptation in affliction is to turn away and close ourselves off from what we perceive has hurt us. Even though Peter was responsible for his own affliction in this case (false expectations that Jesus was his political ruler and denying Jesus three times), Jesus still understood that it would take time for him to wrestle it all out with God, and He was not judging Peter for this.

Like Peter, when we are able to turn again, we ought to “gird ourselves” to return to the responsibilities that we can pick up—to strengthen our Brothers. If we are able, we shouldn’t surrender our duties simply because it is “easier” than facing them.

WITHIN SIGHT OF ETERNITY

One of the great blessings of Job and Jeremiah’s testimonies is in their conclusions. Both Job and Jeremiah are brought to the same understanding through their terrible ordeals.

We see Jeremiah concludes chapter 3 of Lamentations by declaring God is Holy and it is eternity, not this life, that is our only hope:

“Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I have hope in Him.’ The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is hope. Let him give his cheek to the smiter, let him be filled with reproach. For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men.”

(Lamentations 3:19-33)

“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him. This also will be my salvation, For a godless man may not come before His presence” (Job 13:15-16). It was in the actual presence of God that Job finally understood why everything has happened. In the face of Eternity itself, everything becomes clear:

*“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; **But now my eye sees You;** Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:2-6)

In the presence of God and with sight of eternity, Job finally understands what the hell he has been through is all about, and he is so overwhelmed that he retracts and repents of all his anguish. Some of us in lesser straights can understand this without physically seeing God. King David came to this understanding: *“I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord”* (Psalm 27:13-14).

Job was in such despair that he could not understand this without seeing God. Affliction and suffering rob us of our flesh – even the physical pleasures God created for us to enjoy and look forward to in life. It is very painful to have your “life” destroyed. Especially when it is the “life” everyone else around you is able to live unmolested by affliction. We may feel robbed, cheated, and picked on. “Why me, God?” we wonder.

But we see through these experiences that often the end result is a narrowing of our focus on eternity instead of this life because this life becomes a hell. But that doesn’t make it any less painful, nor does it make us any less deserving of kindness, empathy, and compassion.

GOD KNOWS

Jesus suffered more than any man on earth—more even than Job:

“He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our

griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” (Isaiah 53:3-4)

Do we acknowledge this to say we should just “put up or shut up” because our situation can never measure up to His? No. We affirm this because it is our promise that we have an intercessor—God Himself—Who understands what we are going through, having gone through it all for us. *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).*

Like Job or Jeremiah, it was Jesus Who said, *“My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me” (Matthew 26:38b).* And though He knew why He was on earth, He still cried out in the frailty of His flesh, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46b)* God knows. He knows what affliction, suffering, grief, and despair is like.

We don’t always know why we suffer, but we can be confident that God understands intimately what we go through, and we will be restored and glorified in eternity for every trial and affliction we endure here.

CONCLUSION

These testimonies are in God’s Word to help us sympathize with the afflicted, to better understand what they are going through, even if they cannot speak about it. They are also in His Word so that the afflicted themselves can know that God is aware of their plight and has not truly abandoned them. And finally, He has given us these testimonies to point to the permanency of Eternity in an uncertain world.

When confronted by friends and family suffering affliction, God wants us to be present, to be kind, to be willing to bear another person’s burdens. We should not be preachy, cajoling, or accusing. We should also do what we can to keep all eyes on Eternity.

“As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful” (Job 5:10-11), “for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18), “for just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:5).

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

Even so, Amen.