

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL

LESSONS OF JOB (Part 44)

FOCUSING ONLY ON GOD

The story of Job has an interesting thing to teach us, among the many lessons we have already been learning. It is about true servanthood[1] and our life in community.

Community is about living and serving together as God's people. It is about a relationship with God and with those persons who are our brethren. By the very nature of community life and service, our fraternal relationships are intense. We love God and we love each other. We are Christ to each other, and we find comfort and care from God through our brethren.

This is where the problem comes in. Simply put, individuals disappoint and fail us. We become so dependent upon the love and care of our brethren that when they do something we consider negative, we become distraught and disappointed and hurt. Consequently, some grow cold, some nurse their hurt, some quietly seethe in anger, some quit their service, some lay low, some fall away totally.

Interestingly, God allows such tensions and conflicts to happen in community.[2] Guess what? This is because God desires to bring us into a deeper relationship with Himself. Part of this is purifying our intentions--why we are in community and serving Him. But much more, such a deeper relationship involves a realization that in the end, it is He, and only He, who will never fail us. The only perfect loving person is God alone.

Why are we in community? Certainly because God called us and touched us. But it is also because we have a number of other reasons: feeling comfortable, enjoying friends, having satisfaction in accomplishments, having our needs met, and so on. These are not wrong. In fact, they indeed are part of the blessings of community life.

But to what extent does our emotional well-being depend on such? If we were to lose these things, would we still persevere in God's call to community life and service?

Let us take a look at Job. He was a blameless and upright man, well regarded in the community, just in all his ways. I would say he would be the "perfect" community member and even leader. But he lost everything. Was it fair?

Since he was a good man, Job expected that God would bless him. It was simply part of the package. Satan in a way was right in his thinking about people, saying that Job was upright only because indeed God had blessed him. His three friends were on the same line of thought, saying that he must have sinned because God had punished him.

Job was left only with his life, his wife, and his three friends. But they were no comfort to him. His life was miserable. His wife nagged him to curse God and die. His friends accused him unfairly. Job must have been terribly disappointed with these people closest to him.

But Job remained steadfast in his relationship with God. Though Job questioned God, though he grappled with what had happened, though he despairingly just wished he had never been born, he never turned away from God.

God had stripped Job of everything. In the end there was no one else and nothing else but God. Know what? That is when God had Job where He wanted him. No longer dependent on material blessings, on recognition from peers and subordinates, or on a happy life. Job was no longer dependent on anything or anyone but God.

What would have happened if Job had been focused on, or drew his consolation and happiness from, the blessings? When he was afflicted, he would have fallen away. In the same way, if we are focused on anything or anyone other than God, we are in danger of being swept away.

Such focus on others other than God comes in subtle ways.

- We do not like the household we are assigned to.
- We do not like the leader placed over us.
- We disagree with the decisions of those over us.
- We disagree with the way decisions are made.
- We do not like our service.
- We do not like how life in community is handled.
- We have a negative view of certain leaders.

Now do not get me wrong. Part of the dynamics of community life is that there indeed will be disagreements. But we have ways of resolving these. We have processes by which one's dissenting opinion can be heard. In fact, handled correctly, such difficulties can be great avenues for growth in relationships and spirituality. Job grappled with God, and God intended that process to precisely be part of his eventual enlightenment. We can stand fast on what we believe to be right. We do not have to just give up our conviction.

But in the end, we need to surrender. And we surrender to no one else but God.

We need to ask ourselves. Why am I in community? Because I like the people? Who am I serving? The one over me? Why am I serving? Because the leader inspires me?

I am not saying that these do not matter. They do. But if such is our focus, then we have the wrong focus. If such determines our spiritual and emotional well-being, then we have misplaced our hope. Our focus and our hope can only be God.

Our human brethren will fail us, they will disappoint us. But Jesus never will. We serve under human leaders, but it is Jesus we truly serve.

Satan will seek to undermine us. We can lose what we consider important and precious to us. God will allow this, to test us. The testing can be severe, like Job. Or it can be much lesser tests, like our disappointments and hurts in community.

If we have our focus right, then we can weather the storm. If we are to be proven faithful, enduring and persevering no matter what, our hope and our trust and our joy can only ultimately be in God.

Community is God's blessing to us. But that includes the positive as well as the negative things. It is part of the one package by which God desires to continue to form us.

Let us thank God for community. Let us thank God for the brothers and sisters that He gives us in community. Let us love and cherish them. And when the time comes when we face disappointments and trials because of our brethren, let us look to Him who will never fail us.

Like Job, in every circumstance let us always say, "blessed be the name of the Lord!"

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[1] This lesson would be especially true for servant leaders.

[2] We of course have our free will, plus our own shortcomings.