

## Job 4:1-21

### When Well-Intended Words Become Weapons

<sup>1</sup> Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

<sup>2</sup> *"If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?  
Yet who can keep from speaking?"*

<sup>3</sup> *Behold, you have instructed many,  
and you have strengthened the weak hands.*

<sup>4</sup> *Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,  
and you have made firm the feeble knees.*

<sup>5</sup> *But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;  
it touches you, and you are dismayed.*

<sup>6</sup> *Is not your fear of God your confidence,  
and the integrity of your ways your hope?*

<sup>7</sup> *"Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?  
Or where were the upright cut off?"*

<sup>8</sup> *As I have seen, those who plow iniquity  
and sow trouble reap the same.*

<sup>9</sup> *By the breath of God they perish,  
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.*

<sup>10</sup> *The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,  
the teeth of the young lions are broken.*

<sup>11</sup> *The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,  
and the cubs of the lioness are scattered."*

<sup>12</sup> *"Now a word was brought to me stealthily;  
my ear received the whisper of it.*

<sup>13</sup> *Amid thoughts from visions of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on men,*

<sup>14</sup> *dread came upon me, and trembling,  
which made all my bones shake.*

<sup>15</sup> *A spirit glided past my face;  
the hair of my flesh stood up.*

<sup>16</sup> *It stood still,  
but I could not discern its appearance.*

*A form was before my eyes;  
there was silence, then I heard a voice:*

<sup>17</sup> *'Can mortal man be in the right before God?  
Can a man be pure before his Maker?*

<sup>18</sup> *Even in his servants he puts no trust,  
and his angels he charges with error;*

- <sup>19</sup> *how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,  
whose foundation is in the dust,  
who are crushed like the moth.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces;  
they perish forever without anyone regarding it.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them,  
do they not die, and that without wisdom?"* – Job 4:1-21 ESV

We all have them – well-meaning friends who step alongside us during times of difficulty and seasons of suffering spouting sanctimonious sermonettes on our condition. They're the Scripture police who tend to quote passages they don't fully understand and draw conclusions based on scant information and little or no experience. These people don't intend to hurt anyone, but in their zeal to "encourage," they do more harm than good.

Job's friend, Eliphaz, was one of these types of individuals. In the midst of all of Job's grief and suffering, he shows up on the scene lobbing all kinds of theological and psychological hand grenades into Job's pity party. He has taken one look at Job's circumstances and reached a conclusion: Job is guilty of something. He has to be.

But Eliphaz prefaces his verbal barrage on his suffering friend with what appears to be a kind and gracious request to share his thoughts. He and his companions have completed a seven-day-long wake, where they sat by Job's side as he mourned the deaths of his ten children and the loss of his entire economic empire. They sat in silence as their devastated friend attempted to heal from his deep emotional wounds while suffering from a debilitating and painful skin disease.

In time, Eliphaz grew impatient and decided it was time to speak. He had seen enough and was ready to help his friend come to grips with the real source of Job's problems. Knowing that Job is in no mood to hear what he has to say, Eliphaz begs his friend to show patience as he shares his enlightened insights. Then, in a somewhat heavy-handed attempt to gain Job's ear, Eliphaz flatters his suffering friend by recalling how Job had so often played the role of comforting counselor in the lives of others.

*"In the past you have encouraged many people;  
you have strengthened those who were weak.  
Your words have supported those who were falling;  
you encouraged those with shaky knees."* – Job 4:3-4 NLT

In a sense, Eliphaz is saying, "I'm only doing what you would do if the shoe was on the other foot." Eliphaz is trying to prepare Job for the "truth bomb" he is about to drop. In the lengthy speech he has prepared, Eliphaz is going to share some things that Job is not going to want to hear. Eliphaz knows his words are going to be painful and difficult to accept but they need to be said, and he challenges Job to accept them like a man.

He levels an accusation of duplicity, suggesting that Job has always been quick to hand out advice to his suffering friends but now that he is the one doing the suffering, he crumples like a house of cards.

*“But now when trouble strikes, you lose heart.  
You are terrified when it touches you.” – Job 4:5 NLT*

These words seem to echo the sentiments found in the Book of Proverbs.

*An open rebuke  
is better than hidden love!*

*Wounds from a sincere friend  
are better than many kisses from an enemy. – Proverbs 27:5-6 NLT*

*The heartfelt counsel of a friend  
is as sweet as perfume and incense. – Proverbs 27:9 NLT*

*As iron sharpens iron,  
so a friend sharpens a friend. – Proverbs 27:17 NLT*

But friendship isn't necessarily a guarantee of wise counsel. Well-intentioned friends can end up giving poor advice and questionable counsel. A close and intimate relationship doesn't automatically qualify someone to serve as an infallible source of wisdom. Eliphaz meant well, and much of what he had to say contained a semblance of truth, but there was a great deal about Job's situation to which he was ignorant.

From his limited vantage point, Eliphaz had come to certain conclusions regarding Job's circumstances. From the outside looking in, he assessed the scene and determined the cause of Job's suffering, and he validated his conclusions by spiritualizing them. He claims to have had a vision in the night.

*“This truth was given to me in secret,  
as though whispered in my ear.  
It came to me in a disturbing vision at night,  
when people are in a deep sleep.  
Fear gripped me,  
and my bones trembled.  
A spirit swept past my face,  
and my hair stood on end.  
The spirit stopped, but I couldn't see its shape.  
There was a form before my eyes.  
In the silence I heard a voice...” – Job 4:12-16 NLT*

Eliphaz doesn't attribute this vision to Yahweh. He never claims to have received a word from God Almighty. He simply saw "a form" that whispered a cryptic message in his ear.

*"Can a mortal be innocent before God?*

*Can anyone be pure before the Creator?" – Job 4:17 NLT*

Eliphaz heard a voice, but he could not name its source. He had a vision, but he had no way of knowing who this "spirit" was or whether the message was God-ordained. From his ethereal night encounter, Eliphaz built an entire case against Job. He wrongly concluded that Job must be guilty of something. Otherwise, why would he be suffering so much loss and pain?

In the second half of his speech, he draws the following conclusion:

*"...evil does not spring from the soil, and trouble does not sprout from the earth. People are born for trouble as predictably as sparks fly upward from a fire." – Job 5:6-7 NLT*

Bad things don't just happen. They're the result of bad choices made by individuals. In other words, you reap what you sow. And Job must have sown some *really* wild oats at some point in his past. Eliphaz admits that Job was a pretty good guy. He had been an encouragement to a lot of people over the years. He had been a source of comfort and strength to others when they needed him. He had always been there with a kind word and a listening ear. But he must have done something to deserve this bizarre turn of affairs. These things don't just happen.

The problem with Eliphaz's speech is that it contains a modicum of truth. He has a lot of good things to say but he suffers from bad timing and a lousy understanding of reality. He speaks of things he doesn't know. He makes assumptions about things he doesn't understand. He is judging based on the circumstances but can't see what God sees. He can't even see God working behind the scenes. And isn't that how we all approach the presence of trials and troubles in our lives?

We draw conclusions. We make assumptions. And we pass out words of wisdom like they were so much Valentine's candy. We mix a touch of biblical truth with a little bit of home-spun wisdom and then baste our friends with this toxic marinade of self-righteous piety. Eliphaz was dispensing truth like a doctor handing out prescriptions for a condition he had yet to diagnose; a process that will render perfectly safe drugs potentially deadly. We do that when we reach hasty conclusions about the spiritual condition of others based on circumstances alone. It reminds me of the story in the Gospel of John. Jesus is walking with His disciples, and they encounter a man blind from birth. His disciples reveal a lot about their theology when they ask Jesus, "Teacher, why was this man born blind? Was it a result of his own sins or those of his parents?" (John 9:2 NLT). To their surprise, Jesus responded, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins, he was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him" (John 9:3 NLT).

The truth is, we don't know what God is doing behind the scenes. We don't know why certain situations are as they are, and if we're not careful, like Eliphaz we can hastily draw wrong

conclusions and hand out poor advice. When Job needed comfort, he got unnecessary conviction. When he needed a listening ear, he got a lecture. Was a lot of what was said true? You bet. But it was misapplied and mistakenly meted out. In his commentary on the book of Job, John Gill says this about Eliphaz's little speech:

"and he 'said' not anything by way of condolence or consolation, not pitying Job's case, nor comforting him in his afflicted circumstances, as they required both; but reproaching him as a wicked and hypocritical man, not acting like himself formerly, or according to his profession and principles, but just the reverse: this was a new trial to Job, and some think the sorest of all; it was as a sword in his bones, which was very cutting to him; as oil cast into a fiery furnace in which he now was, which increased the force and fury of it; and as to vinegar an opened and bleeding wound, which makes it smart the more." – John Gill, *Exposition on the Entire Bible, the Book of Job*

A big part of ministering to others is learning to listen well. Sometimes the greatest form of comfort is silence. But if you're going to say anything at all, maybe we could take notes from the words of Isaiah.

*Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. – Isaiah 35:4-5 NIV*

Strengthen, steady, encourage, and point them to God. Lift them up, don't tear them down.

*Timely advice is lovely,  
like golden apples in a silver basket.*

*To one who listens, valid criticism  
is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry.*

*Trustworthy messengers refresh like snow in summer.  
They revive the spirit of their employer. – Proverbs 25:11-13 NLT*

## Job 15:1-16

### A Time to Listen and Love

<sup>1</sup> *Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:*

<sup>2</sup> *“Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge,  
and fill his belly with the east wind?*

<sup>3</sup> *Should he argue in unprofitable talk,  
or in words with which he can do no good?*

<sup>4</sup> *But you are doing away with the fear of God  
and hindering meditation before God.*

<sup>5</sup> *For your iniquity teaches your mouth,  
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.*

<sup>6</sup> *Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;  
your own lips testify against you.*

<sup>7</sup> *“Are you the first man who was born?  
Or were you brought forth before the hills?*

<sup>8</sup> *Have you listened in the council of God?  
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?*

<sup>9</sup> *What do you know that we do not know?  
What do you understand that is not clear to us?*

<sup>10</sup> *Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,  
older than your father.*

<sup>11</sup> *Are the comforts of God too small for you,  
or the word that deals gently with you?*

<sup>12</sup> *Why does your heart carry you away,  
and why do your eyes flash,*

<sup>13</sup> *that you turn your spirit against God  
and bring such words out of your mouth?*

<sup>14</sup> *What is man, that he can be pure?  
Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?*

<sup>15</sup> *Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones,  
and the heavens are not pure in his sight;*

<sup>16</sup> *how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,  
a man who drinks injustice like water!” – Job 15:1-16 ESV*

Eliphaz has heard enough. Having listened to Job’s lengthy diatribe, Eliphaz decides to speak up again and delivers a second speech aimed at exposing his friend’s pride and arrogance. He can’t believe the cockiness and overconfidence that Job displays. How can any man declare himself to be innocent in the eyes of God?

While Eliphaz tries to come across as defending the integrity of God, he seems more concerned about his own reputation. He has taken Job's words personally and determined that his own integrity as a friend and a counselor has come under attack. How dare Job reject the advice of such learned men as Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar? He is so upset that he describes Job as a veritable blowhard who spews mindless rhetoric and rejects the wise counsel of his betters.

*"You are nothing but a windbag.  
The wise don't engage in empty chatter.  
What good are such words?" – Job 15:2-3 NLT*

Eliphaz is careful to keep God at the center of his argument, accusing Job of having no fear or reverence for the Lord. He wants to paint Job as an angry apostate whose very words condemn and convict him. The very fact that Job can so easily rail against the Almighty is ample proof that he is guilty as charged.

*"Your sins are telling your mouth what to say.  
Your words are based on clever deception.  
Your own mouth condemns you, not I.  
Your own lips testify against you." – Job 15:5-6 NLT*

But it becomes readily apparent that Eliphaz's real point of contention is Job's refusal to take his advice. This has become a personal matter.

*"What do you know that we don't?  
What do you understand that we do not?  
On our side are aged, gray-haired men  
much older than your father!" – Job 15:9-10 NLT*

Eliphaz pulls out the wisdom-is-the-purview-of-the-elderly card. Evidently, either he or one of his companions is older and, therefore, wiser. than Job. Or else he may be suggesting that he's shared the facts surrounding Job's case with other sages and received their endorsement of his conclusions. Either way, Eliphaz seems to believe that he has the upper hand in the debate over Job's guilt or innocence.

He doesn't believe that Job has some kind of special knowledge or direct access to God's divine will. So, Job has no right to reject the counsel of his more learned and experienced peers. Eliphaz can't understand the flippancy and callousness with which Job addresses God. How can this obvious sinner talk to God in the way that he does? As far as Eliphaz can tell, Job's words provide all the proof necessary to reach a verdict of guilt.

*"Is God's comfort too little for you?  
Is his gentle word not enough?  
What has taken away your reason?  
What has weakened your vision,*

*that you turn against God  
and say all these evil things?” – Job 15:11-13 NLT*

Eliphaz is totally convinced of Job’s guilt and refuses to consider any other option. He views his friend as “a corrupt and sinful person with a thirst for wickedness” (Job 15:16 NLT), and nothing is going to change his mind.

But where is the compassion? Why can’t Eliphaz manage to muster up any empathy or sympathy for his suffering friend? In Proverbs 15:4, the words of Solomon seem to have been written with Eliphaz and his friends in mind.

*Gentle words are a tree of life;  
a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

*The Message* puts it this way: *Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim.*

In one of his psalms, David described wicked people as those who “plot evil in their hearts and stir up trouble all day long. Their tongues sting like a snake; the venom of a viper drips from their lips” (Psalm 140:2-3 NLT). How is it that Job’s friends have become so caustic and condescending? Why have they chosen to dial up the rhetoric and intensify their attacks on Job’s integrity?

Eliphaz has transformed from a well-meaning friend to a full-fledged adversary. He is on the attack and seems frustrated at Job’s continued claims of innocence.

Eliphaz and his companions are now on a mission to convince Job of his guilt and they will stop at nothing to accomplish that objective. Any concern they may have had for Job’s feelings is long gone. This has gotten personal. They know they are right, which means Job is wrong. He just refuses to admit it. But they are not going to give up easily. They tell Job he is wicked, deceived, defiant, stubborn, and doomed if he doesn’t confess his guilt. They will even go so far as to blame the deaths of Job’s children on his sinfulness. They will attempt to soften their words by using farming metaphors (shriveled weeds, a vine whose grapes are harvested before they are ripe, an olive tree that sheds its blossoms so the fruit cannot form, etc.), but the pain hurts just as bad. Now Job not only has to mourn the loss of all his children, but he must also listen to accusations that he is the one responsible for their deaths.

What can we learn from this? What lessons are there in this passage for us? The simple one seems to be the destructive power of our tongues. We can use them to encourage and heal or to discourage and do lasting harm. Sometimes we may not mean to hurt others with our words, but when we fail to think before we speak, we can end up doing lasting damage. Job’s friends could have used the advice of James.

*My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. –  
James 1:19 NASB*



They weren't willing to listen to Job and they didn't seem interested in what God might have to say about the situation. They had already reached their conclusion, and when Job refused to agree with their assessment, they became angry. And their anger led to even harsher words for their suffering friend.

These exchanges between Job and his friends remind me of the remarkable power contained in my own words. With them, I can bring about blessing or cursing. I can use them to build up or tear down. I can speak words of kindness and compassion, or I can speak words of criticism and accusation. Job needed true friends who cared more for his heart than for their need to be right. He needed compassion, not correction.

I am reminded of that famous passage from the pen of Solomon:

*For everything there is a season,  
 a time for every activity under heaven.  
 A time to be born and a time to die.  
 A time to plant and a time to harvest.  
 A time to kill and a time to heal.  
 A time to tear down and a time to build up.  
 A time to cry and a time to laugh.  
 A time to grieve and a time to dance.  
 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.  
 A time to embrace and a time to turn away.  
 A time to search and a time to quit searching.  
 A time to keep and a time to throw away.  
**A time to tear and a time to mend.**  
**A time to be quiet and a time to speak.**  
**A time to love and a time to hate.**  
 A time for war and a time for peace. – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NLT*

There's a right time for everything, and the time was right for Job's friends to shut up, listen up, and lift up. May each of us learn to know the difference.

**Job 15-17-35****Quick to Listen and Slow to Speak**

<sup>17</sup> *"I will show you; hear me,  
and what I have seen I will declare*  
<sup>18</sup> *(what wise men have told,  
without hiding it from their fathers,*  
<sup>19</sup> *to whom alone the land was given,  
and no stranger passed among them).*  
<sup>20</sup> *The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,  
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.*  
<sup>21</sup> *Dreadful sounds are in his ears;  
in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.*  
<sup>22</sup> *He does not believe that he will return out of darkness,  
and he is marked for the sword.*  
<sup>23</sup> *He wanders abroad for bread, saying, 'Where is it?'*  
*He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand;*  
<sup>24</sup> *distress and anguish terrify him;*  
*they prevail against him, like a king ready for battle.*  
<sup>25</sup> *Because he has stretched out his hand against God  
and defies the Almighty,*  
<sup>26</sup> *running stubbornly against him  
with a thickly bossed shield;*  
<sup>27</sup> *because he has covered his face with his fat  
and gathered fat upon his waist*  
<sup>28</sup> *and has lived in desolate cities,  
in houses that none should inhabit,  
which were ready to become heaps of ruins;*  
<sup>29</sup> *he will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure,  
nor will his possessions spread over the earth;*  
<sup>30</sup> *he will not depart from darkness;  
the flame will dry up his shoots,  
and by the breath of his mouth he will depart.*  
<sup>31</sup> *Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself,  
for emptiness will be his payment.*  
<sup>32</sup> *It will be paid in full before his time,  
and his branch will not be green.*  
<sup>33</sup> *He will shake off his unripe grape like the vine,  
and cast off his blossom like the olive tree.*  
<sup>34</sup> *For the company of the godless is barren,  
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.*  
<sup>35</sup> *They conceive trouble and give birth to evil,  
and their womb prepares deceit."* – Job 15:17-35 ESV

Eliphaz has a way with words but it would be difficult to describe him as an encourager. He has a gift for crafting well-worded sentences that paint vivid images in the mind, yet do little to lift up the spirits of the one to whom they're directed. This guy is a veritable factory of one-liners and memorable word pictures. His vocabulary is impressive, as is his ability to string together powerfully worded indictments that masquerade as well-intended counsel to his afflicted friend.

His gift of persuasion is hard to argue with and one can almost find themselves nodding their head in agreement as he waxes eloquent about Job's guilt and his need for repentance. After all, he seems to know what he's talking about and even claims to have plenty of hard-earned personal experience that lends him credibility and authority in the matter.

*"If you will listen, I will show you.  
I will answer you from my own experience.  
And it is confirmed by the reports of wise men  
who have heard the same thing from their fathers—  
from those to whom the land was given  
long before any foreigners arrived."* – Job 15:17-19 NLT

He claims to be backed by the wisdom of the ages, so his advice should be heeded and his words should go unchallenged. For Job to try and refute Eliphaz's counsel would be to reject generations of proven insight into the human experience. He would be standing opposed to centuries worth of collective knowledge and stubbornly rejecting the tried-and-true insights of the sages.

How is Job supposed to withstand that kind of withering assault on his innocence? If he continues to hold his ground and stubbornly cling to his blamelessness, he will only add fuel to the fire and validate Eliphaz's claims. After all, Eliphaz has carefully constructed his prosecution of Job, using any claims of innocence as proof of guilt. In his estimation, only the wicked would dare to lash out at God. A truly innocent man would show honor and respect by confessing his guilt and placing himself in the hands of the Almighty. And Eliphaz strengthens his case by comparing Job's actions with those of the wicked and godless.

*"The wicked writhe in pain throughout their lives.  
Years of trouble are stored up for the ruthless.  
The sound of terror rings in their ears,  
and even on good days they fear the attack of the destroyer."* – Job 15:20-21 NLT

Eliphaz is anything but subtle. He claims that Job is only getting what he deserves for a life of hidden wickedness. Job may have fooled his family and friends but he couldn't pull the wool over God's eyes. Now, he was getting his just desserts. At least, that's how Eliphaz saw it.

He compares Job to a king who knows he is facing defeat at the hands of a more powerful foe but stubbornly clings to his false hope of victory. These kinds of fools "shake their fists at God,

defying the Almighty. Holding their strong shields, they defiantly charge against him” (Job 15:25-26 NLT).

Don’t miss what Eliphaz is doing. He is setting Job up by turning every attempt at self-justification into proof of guilt. If Job even dares to question his circumstances, he is “shaking his fist at God” and “defying the Almighty.” This assertion virtually eliminates all options for Job. He’s damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t. His persistent pleas of innocence will only confirm his guilt but so will a vow of silence. Eliphaz has painted Job into a corner and left him with no way out.

Sensing that he has Job on the ropes, Eliphaz increases the intensity of his attacks, painting his hapless friend as being overweight from a life of over-indulgence. He is fat and bloated from decades of excess and extreme wickedness.

*“These wicked people are heavy and prosperous;  
their waists bulge with fat.” – Job 15:27 NLT*

Subtlety is not Eliphaz’s strong suit. He wields words like a sledgehammer, obliterating any semblance of hope that may remain in Job’s already fractured heart. Eliphaz has gotten personal by attacking Job’s physical appearance along with his integrity. Once again, Eliphaz is attempting to portray Job as a hypocrite and a fraud. He is not what he appears to be. Eliphaz has deduced that the pity-producing cries of his suffering friend are nothing but a cleverly orchestrated facade designed to distract and deceive. The more vociferously Job demands his guiltlessness, the more condemned he stands.

It’s quite clear that Eliphaz has no doubts regarding Job’s guilt. In his mind, Job is wicked and godless, and his losses are all the proof he needs to elicit a guilty verdict from the Judge of the universe. He believes he has God on his side and one can almost see the smirk on his face as he confidently asserts that the riches of the wicked “will not last, and their wealth will not endure” (Job 15:29 NLT). Job has seen his wealth evaporate before his eyes. He has nothing left. And, for Eliphaz, this is further proof of his friend’s culpability. With Job’s finances in shambles, he has no resources on which to rely, and Eliphaz knows it. In fact, he coldly states that Job’s poverty has left him with nothing to look forward to than a life of emptiness. It will be Job’s only reward.

This man is relentless and compassionless. He has become so determined to prove himself right that he has become blind to the wrongs he has inflicted on his helpless and hopeless friend. Eliphaz has lost all capacity to see Job’s pain and provide solace. His words have become pain-inducing, not peace-producing.

The apostle James points out the danger of an unbridled tongue.

*If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means*

*caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*  
– James 1:26-27 NLT

Job was not a widow or an orphan, but he was a man in great distress, and Eliphaz and his friends, in their self-righteousness, were using their tongues to burden him with a heavy weight of unnecessary pain and suffering. James went on to describe the damaging influence of an unbridled tongue.

*...the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.* – James 3:6 NLT

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were all adept at wielding their tongues but the byproduct of their efforts was anything but uplifting. Job had not been comforted or cared for. Their religious speech had not produced righteousness. And James would have called them out for using the same tongue with which they praised God to curse one who had been made in the image of God (James 3:9). In doing so, these men had put themselves in the place of God. Each of them viewed himself as Job's judge, jury, and executioner.

I believe James would have counseled Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to back off and reconsider how they were using their tongues. He would have asked them to examine their motives. He would have questioned the health of their own hearts and encouraged them to do a bit of personal soul-searching to see if their wisdom was really from God or not.

*If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.* – James 3:13-16 NLT

Each of us could stand to learn from the not-so-flattering examples of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. We would do well to consider our own tendency to give out unsolicited advice and, in doing so, to do immeasurable damage to those who desperately need a word of encouragement in their time of need. Each of us would be wise to consider the words of James.

*You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.* – James 1:19-20 NLT

May we not forget the words Jesus spoke to the self-righteous and quick-to-judge Pharisees: "...let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" (John 8:7 NLT)

## Job 22:1-30

### Playing God is a Dangerous Game

<sup>1</sup> Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

<sup>2</sup> *"Can a man be profitable to God?*

*Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself.*

<sup>3</sup> *Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right,  
or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?*

<sup>4</sup> *Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you  
and enters into judgment with you?*

<sup>5</sup> *Is not your evil abundant?*

*There is no end to your iniquities.*

<sup>6</sup> *For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing  
and stripped the naked of their clothing.*

<sup>7</sup> *You have given no water to the weary to drink,  
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.*

<sup>8</sup> *The man with power possessed the land,  
and the favored man lived in it.*

<sup>9</sup> *You have sent widows away empty,  
and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.*

<sup>10</sup> *Therefore snares are all around you,  
and sudden terror overwhelms you,*

<sup>11</sup> *or darkness, so that you cannot see,  
and a flood of water covers you.*

<sup>12</sup> *"Is not God high in the heavens?*

*See the highest stars, how lofty they are!*

<sup>13</sup> *But you say, 'What does God know?*

*Can he judge through the deep darkness?*

<sup>14</sup> *Thick clouds veil him, so that he does not see,  
and he walks on the vault of heaven.'*

<sup>15</sup> *Will you keep to the old way  
that wicked men have trod?*

<sup>16</sup> *They were snatched away before their time;  
their foundation was washed away.*

<sup>17</sup> *They said to God, 'Depart from us,'  
and 'What can the Almighty do to us?'*

<sup>18</sup> *Yet he filled their houses with good things—  
but the counsel of the wicked is far from me.*

<sup>19</sup> *The righteous see it and are glad;  
the innocent one mocks at them,*

- <sup>20</sup> saying, 'Surely our adversaries are cut off,  
and what they left the fire has consumed.'
- <sup>21</sup> "Agree with God, and be at peace;  
thereby good will come to you.
- <sup>22</sup> Receive instruction from his mouth,  
and lay up his words in your heart.
- <sup>23</sup> If you return to the Almighty you will be built up;  
if you remove injustice far from your tents,
- <sup>24</sup> if you lay gold in the dust,  
and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed,
- <sup>25</sup> then the Almighty will be your gold  
and your precious silver.
- <sup>26</sup> For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty  
and lift up your face to God.
- <sup>27</sup> You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you,  
and you will pay your vows.
- <sup>28</sup> You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you,  
and light will shine on your ways.
- <sup>29</sup> For when they are humbled you say, 'It is because of pride';  
but he saves the lowly.
- <sup>30</sup> He delivers even the one who is not innocent,  
who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands." – Job 22:1-30 ESV

It doesn't take long for Eliphaz to jump back into the mix, responding to Job with his signature blend of sarcasm and sardonic wit. Openly disgusted with Job's incessant claims of righteousness and innocence, Eliphaz not only maintains his belief in Job's guilt but now insinuates that his entire life has been an elaborate cover-up. He accuses Job of trying to pull a fast one on God.

*"God is so great—higher than the heavens,  
higher than the farthest stars.  
But you reply, 'That's why God can't see what I am doing!  
How can he judge through the thick darkness?  
For thick clouds swirl about him, and he cannot see us.  
He is way up there, walking on the vault of heaven.'" – Job 22:12-14 NLT*

He confidently asserts that Job has spent his entire life pretending to be something other than what he truly was. He had lived the life of a hypocrite, giving off the aura of a godly man while practicing wickedness behind closed doors. This is a serious accusation and one that Eliphaz fails to back up with any evidence. In Eliphaz's eyes, Job is guilty until proven innocent.

In the opening line of his speech, Eliphaz ridicules the very idea that Job was a righteous man, claiming that even if he was, God would not be beholden to him in any way. According to Eliphaz's theology, God doesn't need help from anyone, including the righteous.

*"Can a person do anything to help God?  
Can even a wise person be helpful to him?  
Is it any advantage to the Almighty if you are righteous?  
Would it be any gain to him if you were perfect?" – Job 22:2-3 NLT*

Of course, the obvious answer to his question is, "No." God does need man's help. He does not require our input or assistance. Even the righteous provide no real benefit to God Almighty. But while this may be true, it does not accurately reflect God's view of the righteous and godly.

David paints a much more optimistic view of God's relationship with the righteous.

*...the Lord is in his holy Temple;  
the Lord still rules from heaven.  
He watches everyone closely,  
examining every person on earth.  
The Lord examines both the righteous and the wicked.  
He hates those who love violence.  
He will rain down blazing coals and burning sulfur on the wicked,  
punishing them with scorching winds.  
For the righteous Lord loves justice.  
The virtuous will see his face. – Psalm 11:4-7 NLT*

*For the Lord loves justice,  
and he will never abandon the godly.*

*He will keep them safe forever,  
but the children of the wicked will die. – Psalm 37:28 NLT*

Yet Eliphaz won't even admit that Job is righteous. In his mind, it made no sense to view Job as godly and guiltless.

*"Is it because you're so pious that he accuses you  
and brings judgment against you?  
No, it's because of your wickedness!  
There's no limit to your sins." – Job 22:4-5 NLT*

That was the only logical conclusion Eliphaz could come to, and nothing would sway him from that view. No amount of denial on Job's part would convince Eliphaz to reconsider his position or back down from his relentless attacks. He would not be satisfied until Job confessed or God completed His punishment by taking Job's life.



His entire argument is based on conjecture. He offers no concrete evidence of Job's guilt but doesn't seem to think any is necessary. He just assumes that Job's suffering is evidence enough.

*"For example, you must have lent money to your friend  
and demanded clothing as security.  
Yes, you stripped him to the bone.  
You must have refused water for the thirsty  
and food for the hungry." – Job 22:6-7 NLT*

Eliphaz's entire prosecution strategy is based on an if-then premise. If Job was suffering, then he must have done something to make God angry. His hypothesis that Job was guilty was built on a shaky foundation of conditional statements. The circumstances surrounding Job's life were proof that he had sinned against God. It didn't seem to matter to Eliphaz that he had no proof of Job's suppositional guilt.

*"You must have sent widows away empty-handed  
and crushed the hopes of orphans.  
That is why you are surrounded by traps  
and tremble from sudden fears.  
That is why you cannot see in the darkness,  
and waves of water cover you." – Job 22:9-11 NLT*

It was all so black and white to Eliphaz. His conclusion was the only one that made any sense to him. And the longer Job defended himself, the more Eliphaz wished for his downfall. He was becoming increasingly more volatile in his attacks and anxious to see himself proven to be right. He even infers that Job's inevitable destruction will bring him great joy.

*"The righteous will be happy to see the wicked destroyed,  
and the innocent will laugh in contempt." – Job 22:19 NLT*

But then he softens his stance, in an attempt to portray himself as a loving and compassionate friend. He pleads with Job to confess and repent. It's not too late. If Job will only drop his charade of righteous indignation and admit that he is all Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have claimed him to be, he can experience forgiveness and healing. In other words, Eliphaz tells Job to simply shut up, give up, and own up to his sins.

*"Submit to God, and you will have peace;  
then things will go well for you.  
Listen to his instructions,  
and store them in your heart.  
If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored—  
so clean up your life." – Job 22:21-23 NLT*

Hidden in the somewhat empathetic-sounding rhetoric of this statement is Eliphaz's belief that he is speaking on behalf of God. He is the one whom God is using to "instruct" the wayward and stubbornly sinful Job. If Job will only listen to what Eliphaz and his friends have to say, he will be restored to a right relationship with God. They are the key to Job's restoration.

But there is one more thing that Job will have to do. He will have to clean up his act and give up all his wicked ways. According to Eliphaz, Job was a gluttonous materialist whose love of money had led him to commit all kinds of unjust and ungodly crimes. If he would only repent of his love affair with money and materialism, Job could see an end to his suffering and pain. At least, that was how Eliphaz saw it.

This led Eliphaz to make Job an attractive and difficult-to-resist offer. If Job would only admit his guilt, he could be on the pathway to righteousness and restoration.

*"Then you will take delight in the Almighty  
and look up to God.  
You will pray to him, and he will hear you,  
and you will fulfill your vows to him.  
You will succeed in whatever you choose to do,  
and light will shine on the road ahead of you." – Job 22:26-28 NLT*

Once again, there is an element of truth in what Eliphaz has to say. His words align with those of the apostle John.

*...if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. – 1 John 1:9 NLT*

The Proverbs of Solomon also support Eliphaz's conclusion.

*People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them,  
they will receive mercy. – Proverbs 28:13 NLT*

But the problem was that Eliphaz was assuming guilt when he had no right or authority to do so. He and his two companions were playing God. Ever since their arrival in Uz, they had done nothing but condemn their friend for having sinned against God, with nothing to prove their assertion except circumstantial and unsubstantiated evidence of wrongdoing. Yet, they were right, God does forgive sinners. He can and will restore the repentant. But they had no proof that Job was a sinner in need of repentance. They had assumed the worst and pronounced Job as guilty based on nothing more than their opinions and observations. And in time, God will rebuke them for their insensitivity and insufferable arrogance.