

Disabilities and the Suffering of Job

I read with interest three *Beacon Light* articles (June and July 2011) on the subject of the disabled. Two articles by Karen Daling, who now suffers from multiple sclerosis, analyzed her feelings, including the four ways fellow Christians have reacted to her disability: the avoiders, the Pollyanna encouragers, the mourners, and the listeners. One article by Stephanie Buteyn gave admonition that people with Downs Syndrome need to be included socially in the body of Christ. These articles alerted me to the fact that most of us Christians need more sensitivity training regarding those with special needs.

The day after reading these articles, I was back in my study of the book of Job. I had reached chapter 12, where Job responds to the first set of speeches by his three friends. And there it was, reminiscent of the *Beacon Lights* articles: Job is a diseased, disabled person, and his “friends” are being insensitive.

Job starts out by rebuking his friends, telling them he is not inferior in intelligence or wisdom to them, even though his body is wracked with pain from head to foot. In the past, his friends had respected him, but now that he has lost everything and is diseased besides, they are mocking his words, as if they have all the answers to his problems if only he will listen to them.

In verse 5 Job tells them, “He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.” I think Job sees his influence as greatly reduced because of what has happened to him, almost like a lamp that gives off very little “light” at present. And what do his three friends who are healthy and prosperous do? In their “ease,” they despise him now that he has told them how much his body hurts and how it is so bad that he wishes he had never been born.

Job goes on to say that “the tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.” This should remind us of Psalm 73, where Asaph tells us, “As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain” (vv. 2-6). Job brilliantly puts his finger on the attitudes his three friends are exhibiting.

Then Job says that even the brute creation knows that the hand of the Lord has wrought everything: “Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening” (v. 14). Does not this suggest that any

infirmity we suffer somehow serves God's purposes and we need to trust it is for our ultimate good?

I really paid attention to verse 20: "He [God] removeth the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding the aged." I had never really considered old age as a disability, but of course it is. The "trusty," according to *Strong's Concordance*, is someone who has supported the lives of others and been faithful and trustworthy in his duties, such as parents are to their children. But what happens when parents reach their older years? Their strength and energy is failing. They can't lift heavy things anymore. Maybe their eyes have developed macular degeneration and they can no longer even read their Bibles. They may not be able to go places except in a wheelchair. Their deteriorating minds may not be able to figure things out as formerly, and someone else may need to take over their checkbooks, tax returns, and health insurance applications. They need help, and I observe, at least in Protestant Reformed circles, that church office-bearers and the children and grandchildren of aged parents are very good about taking care of their elderly. The caretakers themselves could probably use some help from others.

Chapter 12 of Job speaks not only of disabilities, but also so strongly about God's sovereignty that it could be used in proof texts. Read it for yourself, and see if this isn't true. Thank you, *Beacon Lights*, for opening up this chapter in Job for me in a new way.