



Dear Friends,

It's easy to be down on Job's friends. After all, Job was. He called them "worthless physicians" (13:4) and "miserable comforters" (16:1). What I appreciate about Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar is that they tried to care for Job, even though their efforts backfired.

When a friend is doing it tough it can be tempting to resist reaching out. You may be unsure whether they want space or would appreciate contact. You may feel uncomfortable about entering into someone else's pain. You tell yourself you have no idea what you would say to them.

The story of Job got me thinking about friends and friendship. I like that Job had friends. I like that they sat with him as he suffered in total silence. I like that they had a go at caring for him.

During one of the darkest moments in Kathryn's and my lives, I was thankful for friends. I appreciated that they reached out to express care. Friends made meals. Friends minded our children. Friends wrote cards. Friends offered words of comfort. Friends gave us a hug. Friends took us out for coffee.

Some of those friends said thoughtless or insensitive things to us. They were well-intentioned, though clumsy. We learnt to practice grace and understanding. We recognized that it is hard to know what to say to someone in our situation. We knew they loved us. They cared. That mattered more than whether or not they said the right thing.

In my darkest hour, I saw a grief counsellor. While counselling was beneficial, what God used most to help me process and deal with my grief were the ordinary expressions of love from friends. My counsellor possessed skills that most of my friends didn't. But what set my friends apart from the counsellor was that he was a professional, whereas my friends loved me.

The importance of having good friends reminds me of a story told about the legendary sports commentator, Dennis Cometti. While Cometti was calling an AFL match, a fellow commentator said that if you needed someone to kick for your life, Magpies player Tarkyn Lockyer would be the man. Dennis Cometti said, "I'd prefer my mum." After a short silence, Cometti added, "She's not a great footballer, but at least she'd care."

One of the most staggering couple of verses in Scripture are in John 15:13-14:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

Jesus considers you and me his friends. That is an amazing truth. He loves like no other. His care is unsurpassable. His attentive to us is incomparable. Nothing, not even death, will separate us from his love for us.

I also find it staggering that Jesus asked his three closest friends for help in his darkest hour in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus felt Job-like as he anticipated the horror of the cross:

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Mt 26:38)

If the Son of God requested the help of friends, how much more do we? Like Job's friends, Peter, James and John failed Jesus. But we know that their failure didn't end the friendship.

Do you have friends you can turn to when you are walking through life's dark valleys? And are you the kind of person who reaches out to a friend when they're doing it tough, even if you might make a hash of it?

God Bless,
Mark Adams