

Session 3: Job and his God

Task 1 Read and react to the text below¹ on one common response to suffering (“fear and scarcity”). Circle what catches your attention.

Unfortunately, one of the things that’s immediately triggered when we go into fear and scarcity is comparison . . . What’s crazy about comparison when it’s triggered by fear and scarcity, is that even our pain and our hurt are not immune to being assessed and ranked, So, without thinking, we start to rank our suffering and use it to deny or give ourselves permission to feel. “I can’t be disappointed about my college graduation right now. Who am I to be sad that I’m not going to be able to have this great ceremony, because there are people sick and dying?” Or, “I can’t be angry and afraid about being sick right now, because there are people sicker than me. I can’t be scared for my children because there are homeless kids who have nowhere to sleep tonight. Why should I be tired and angry, I have a job right now and so many people don’t.”

I get it, I do it, I fight with it, but this is not how emotion or affect works. Emotions do not go away, because we send them a message that, “Hey, message incoming. These feelings are inappropriate and do not score high enough on the suffering board. Please delete all feelings related to this. You are not in pain enough. Thank you.” That’s not the way this works. The emotions that you’re feeling, that we feel, when we deny them double down, they burrow, they fester, they metastasize. And not only do our feelings double down and grow, they invite shame over for the party. Because now, we’re like, “I am a bad person, because I’m sad or scared or lonely, or frustrated or disappointed or pissed off. And other people have it so much worse than me.”

- a. Explain how a “comparison-based” reading of the book of Job would misapply its message.
- b. This approach would represent “spiritual bypassing” because:

¹ Brené Brown, “Brené on Comparative Suffering, the 50/50 Myth, and Settling the Ball,” March 27, 2020, <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-on-comparative-suffering-the-50-50-myth-and-settling-the-ball/>.

Task 2 Below are some common observations about Job’s speeches. Choose one that strikes you as the most significant.

_____ 1. The friends have a lot to say *about* God, but they say nothing *to* God. Only Job speaks to God directly.

_____ 2. Courtroom language dominates Job’s speeches. Job longs for “his day in court” with God. He knows this won’t work, because God is not his peer (9:32), Job doesn’t know how to get a “court date” (23:1–9), and Job does not trust himself to act in his own defense (9:20).

_____ 3. Job wants a mediator (9:33) or an advocate (16:18–21) to intervene between him and God. In 16:18–21 he expresses confidence that somebody on his side is vouching for him in heaven. Compare the “Redeemer” of 19:25.

Task 3 Job 31 is Job’s “closing argument.” Note the specific charges to which he pleads “not guilty.” What do you notice?

Task 4 - God’s Speeches (Job 38–39)

David Clines² lists ten points on the meaning of God’s speeches.

_____ 1. God does not reason with Job. His speeches are not an argument. They present images, not propositions.

_____ 2. The world has been carefully arranged by God in an orderly way.

_____ 3. God’s power is amazing, but his wisdom is even more so.

_____ 4. God loves the details. He knows his creation intimately and personally.

_____ 5. God uses this intimate knowledge to sustain life in all its forms.

_____ 6. God’s world is breathtakingly diverse. God loves each creature for its own sake, not merely because it is good for something or to somebody.

_____ 7. God does not mention the fallen state of the world. It is depicted as just fine the way it is.

_____ 8. Everything in God’s world brings him joy.

_____ 9. Surprisingly, there is no explicit mention of humans.

_____ 10. Creation is, however, described from a human vantage point.

Which of these points answers Job? If none of them does, then **what is God’s answer?**

² Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1089–91.