

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: GOD...in the Storm**

(Studies in the book of Job)

## **A Friend in Need, Indeed**

(Elihu, part 1, Job 32-37)

Study #8

### **Introduction: Just paying dues...**

If you want the privilege of driving on the high-speed (85mph!), relatively traffic-free Highway 130, the road that runs from just east of San Antonio to just north of Georgetown, you've got to pay the toll.

If you want an airline to give you the perks of relatively cheap upgrades to business class and to be treated like royalty in airport lounges, you've got to first fly hundreds of thousands of miles on that airline.

If you want the delight of enjoying your children's growing up years, watching them walk and then run and then read and write and throw and catch and drive and date and all the rest, you've got to first get up at 2:30am night after night and gently rock your baby back to sleep. (As my 75 year old across-the-street neighbor, George, used to tell me - rather insensitively, I thought at the time - when I told him my late night tales of infant woe, "*You're just paying dues.*")

Well, it turns out that if you want to be a friend who can speak deep truth and rich encouragement and hope into the soul of your suffering friend, there is a price to be paid. If you want to be used by God to powerfully point your suffering, grieving friend to trust and obey, there are dues to pay.

It is safe to assume that we who are this morning have a deep longing to be helpful to our friends when they are in need.

There are few visions sweeter than the vision that our friends would turn to us to find perspective and truth and help at a time of crisis.

Today we're going to listen to the words of someone who gave those great gifts to our friend, Job.

Previously, we saw the mess that Job's friends made of their conversations with Job. They missed by a mile, relationally. They missed by a mile, too, in terms of the content of their counsel.

Well, everyone can teach us something - and Job's friends taught us by way of a really negative example how to help our friends. Don't do what they did!

Today, we see a genuinely helpful model.

*Review...*

We now know that Job suffered as few have. His losses were total - and he had a lot to lose. He was enormously wealthy and lost everything in one day. He had a great, large, loving family and lost all ten of his kids in one day. He had enjoyed vigorous health and lost it in one day.

And after all of this, he worshiped and continued to trust God while never denying the tragedy of his losses.

Initially, Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar) helped by sitting in silence with Job as he grieved.

But their soothing silence morphed into toxic talking as they alternately accused Job of causing his own sufferings because of his sin or coldly explained (wrongly) the ways of God and man.

The friends failed. Sadly, so did Job eventually fail. He descended from the heights of worship to the ugliness of demandingness, requiring compassion from his friends and relief from God.

By the time we come to the end of the debates these four former friends are bruised and bloody from having beaten each other up with hurtful words. None of them have anything left to say, as the author tells us at the start of chapter 32.

**[32:1] Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.**

They're done. All in. However, the book is far from over. And in the next six chapters we listen to another speaker: Elihu.<sup>1</sup>

*About Elihu...*

Elihu is a young man, although we don't know what **"young in years"** (32:6) means. I suppose it could mean anything from fifteen to forty five. All we know is that Elihu is considerably younger than Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar.

Despite his youth, though, the author of Job gives more space to the words of Elihu than he did to any of Job's three friends.

His name means *"He is my God"* and we learn that Elihu is of the tribe of the Buzites<sup>2</sup> and of the family of Ram. That is significant because it means that he - out of all the other characters we have seen - is the only one of the genealogical line of Abraham.<sup>3</sup>

Some commentators are ambivalent about Elihu's value as a counselor. Some see him as one who got it just as wrong as Job's three older friends. One of these refers to *"the arrogance of a bloated fool"* when describing Elihu. Another says Elihu is nothing more than the prototypical *"angry young man."*<sup>4</sup>

And then there are those who view Elihu as *"the one who got it right."* Include me in this group.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Among more liberal scholars, there are many who view the speeches of Elihu as a much later addition to the book of Job. My own view is that they form an integral part of the book's original purpose and were not later add-ons.

<sup>2</sup> Uz and Buz were brothers (Genesis 22:1). Job lived in the land of Uz. (Job 1)

<sup>3</sup> See Ruth, chapter 4, which traces the line of Abraham back through Ram. Also, see Matthew 1.

<sup>4</sup> One cynical writer wonders if Elihu had only recently graduated from seminary...

<sup>5</sup> From Reitman: By authenticating Elihu as an inspired and empathic spokesman in response to the futile debate over Job's guilt and God's justice, the author validates Elihu's teaching as authoritative, so that the reader might seriously reflect on the truth that Elihu spoke and take note of Job's subsequent response to God.

Elihu didn't know any more about the heavenly wager than Job or his three friends did. But as I see it, he avoids the errors of the friends. He repeatedly claims that his words are inspired by the Spirit of God.<sup>6</sup>

We notice that not one of the three friends objects to or responds to or contradicts Elihu's speeches. After he's finished talking, Job doesn't have one word to say. The next speaker after Elihu is God<sup>7</sup> - and He validates everything that Elihu has said. At the end of the book, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are censured by God. Not Elihu.

I believe that we are to take what Elihu says as Gospel. He is speaking the truth. He is a model of how to speak to a suffering friend. We, the readers, are invited to listen to and to heed Elihu's inspired instruction.

I plan to bring two messages that center on the words of this young man.

Next week, in the second message I'm going to offer a vision for what we might say to a friend who is suffering that will help them in their walk with God.

Today, however, I want to show the critical first step that we must take if we are going to speak **"God"** into the life of our suffering friend.

There is a toll we must pay if we are going to seriously and powerfully impact our suffering friend. Elihu paid that toll.

The six chapters (32-37) contain four independent speeches, all of them aimed directly at Job.<sup>8</sup>

In speeches two and three, he tells Job that God is just AND that God is justified in not explaining to people why He does what He does! Speech four affirms that all creation is subordinate to God's sovereign rule.

But in the first speech, where we will be today, Elihu explains why he is speaking.

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<sup>6</sup> See 32:8, 18; 33:3-4; 36:2-4.

<sup>7</sup> Elihu is the Lord's forerunner, preparing Job to hear what God will say.

<sup>8</sup> There are some comments aimed at the friends, who are still present, but the content is all for Job.

Without a whole of mind-numbing exploration of the original language, it's pretty clear that a big part of why Elihu is speaking is that he is angry. Three times in three verses we read that Elihu was angry.

He is, first, angry at Job.

### Speaks As a Man Possessed

#### **Possessed by Anger (32:1-5)**

*Angry with Job*

***[32:2] But the anger of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram burned; against Job his anger burned because he justified himself before God.***

When we left Job at the end of his eighth (!) speech, we were convinced (if we hadn't been before) that he had lived an exemplary life. He helped the poor and the weak. He gave aid to widows and orphans.

All of this we learn from Job. But Job went a step too far in his own defense.

Maybe it was because his friends pushed him too hard to admit to sins he hadn't committed; maybe it was because he felt that whatever his sins might have been, his punishment far outweighed the crime; maybe it was because he looked around him and saw people way worse than himself who were doing just fine, thank you.

Whatever the cause, by the end of the debates Job was living for vindication. He was demanding that everyone - his friends and even God! - admit that he was a righteous man. Or, as we read it here, ***“he justified himself before God.”***

Elihu understood that this self-justifying mindset is wrong, wrong, wrong. It is pathological. There is a problem when someone's main aim is to prove to everyone else that they are wrong and he is right.

It's especially wrong when the aim is to convince God that we are right and that He is wrong.

That's where Job was coming from and that's part of the reason for Elihu's anger. But Elihu wasn't only angry with Job. He was also upset with Job's three friends.

*Angry with the three friends*

***[3] And his anger burned against his three friends because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job.***

Evidently, Elihu had been listening to the debates. Maybe lots of other people had been, as well. I hadn't much thought about it before this past week, but it dawned on me that there may have been an audience gathered to hear Job and his three friends go at it.

And we wonder about Elihu. Did he know Job before his trials hit? Did he know of Job's sterling reputation? Had he been there, at the city trash dump, for the seven days and seven nights of silence?

We don't know when he showed up. But, clearly, Elihu has heard what Job had to say and to what the three friends have had to say.

He has heard the friends' explanations and he knows that they got it wrong. They haven't had anything useful to offer Job and that has made him angry.

In Elihu's opinion, friends should be able to answer friends' hard questions. Friends should be able to engage with their friends who are going through tough times. Friends should be able to point their friends to God. Friends should be able to point their friend to maturity and to personal transformation. Friends should be able to help their friends come to a good understanding of TRUTH.

And if, for some reason, a friend isn't able to help his friend, that friend shouldn't simply default to accusation and condemnation! But that is exactly what Job's friends did - and so Elihu is mad.

Job's friends had faulty assumptions about suffering. They said, ***“If you are suffering, you must have sinned. If you are suffering severely, you must have sinned grievously.”***

Elihu will tell us (later - 40:8; 42:7) that this sort of an assumption, this whole way of looking at things, makes God angry. For now, it's enough to see the anger of Elihu.

He has sat silently and waited patiently for the three friends to start helping Job. He didn't jump in. He wanted them to go ahead and get this whole thing worked out.

They didn't, so he's mad. He's mad, and so he's now going to speak.

It's important to see Elihu's anger. It says that there is something alive inside of him. He's not a calculated academic. He's not off in some ivory tower thinking grand thoughts.

No, he's willing to mix it up. He's got some emotional skin in the game. He's engaged.

He is prompted by anger and by something else. There is a holy pressure to speak. He senses a burden from God.

Now, of course he was cautious about speaking at first. After all, the other men were so much older.

### **Possessed By a Burden from God (32:6-22)**

*The caution of youth (?) (vv. 6-7, 9)*

*[4] Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were years older than he. [5] And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of the three men his anger burned.*

*[6] So Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite spoke out and said, "I am young in years and you are old;*

*Therefore I was shy and afraid to tell you what I think.*

*[7] "I thought age should speak, And increased years should teach wisdom..."*

Due to his own and to the friends' age, he didn't jump right in and enter into the debates. And that was good. It is a good and respectful thing for youth to wait for age to give answers. So, he waited and he waited and he waited.

Finally, though, he came to the conclusion that there is something more weighty than years. Realizing that, he spoke up.

*Something more weighty than years (v. 8)*

***[8] "But it is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.***

There was something going on INSIDE of Elihu that made him a fit speaker for this occasion.

His spirit, his *human* spirit, was all stirred up. And his spirit has been informed by and energized by "*the Almighty*."<sup>9</sup>

He is about to directly contradict the words of the elders. That's gutsy. He is going to claim that God has given him more wisdom than he has heard from them.

He summarizes their words as unwise, unjust, unhelpful, and unreasonable. They have failed.<sup>10</sup>

And Elihu? He is bursting to speak what he knows to be the truth.

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<sup>9</sup> Later, in chapter 33, Elihu makes a direct reference to the Spirit of God, a clear Old Testament reference to the third Person of the Trinity.

<sup>10</sup> [9] "*The abundant in years may not be wise, Nor may elders understand justice.*

[10] "*So I say, 'Listen to me, I too will tell what I think.'*

[11] "*Behold, I waited for your words, I listened to your reasonings,*

*While you pondered what to say.*

[12] "*I even paid close attention to you; Indeed, there was no one who refuted Job, Not one of you who answered his words.*

[13] "*Do not say, 'We have found wisdom; God will rout him, not man.'*

[14] "*For he has not arranged his words against me, Nor will I reply to him with your arguments.*

[15] "*They are dismayed, they no longer answer; Words have failed them.*

*Elihu's pressure to speak (vv. 16-22)*

**[16] "Shall I wait, because they do not speak,  
Because they stop and no longer answer?"**

**[17] "I too will answer my share,  
I also will tell my opinion.**

**[18] "For I am full of words;  
The spirit within me constrains me.**

**[19] "Behold, my belly is like unvented wine,  
Like new wineskins it is about to burst.**

**[20] "Let me speak that I may get relief;  
Let me open my lips and answer.**

He's not about to sit around and wait anymore. Job deserves better than the answers his friends have given.

Whether "*The spirit*" (v. 18) is a reference to his human spirit or to the Spirit of God is not clear (although most commentators view it as his own human spirit). What is clear is that there is a pressure inside of Elihu to speak. He's like a shaken bottle of Coke.

He is no longer able to remain silent! And God is in it. This is not just a young man who has to get something off his chest.

**[21] "Let me now be partial to no one,  
Nor flatter any man.**

**[22] "For I do not know how to flatter,  
Else my Maker would soon take me away.**

Elihu has something to say that will give light to Job's darkness. Job's friends covered the flashlight. He'll uncover it.

So...Do you want to bring light to your suffering friend's darkness? Of course you do. You envision yourself being God's instrument to bring blessing and healing and insight in times of great pain.

Are you emotionally present? Is there something like passion prompting you to speak? Passion for God. Passion for truth. Passion for your friend's well-being.

Do you feel as if you **have to speak** or you'll explode? If not, your words will fall flat and you'll be about as effective as Eliphaz was with Job. But when that sense of internal pressure is in place, when by prayer and waiting and love for your friend you emotionally engage, you're positioning yourself to be a real help to your suffering friend.

Watch what Elihu does as he begins to speak with the long-suffering Job. It's not complicated. In fact, it's very straightforward and is something that all of us can do.

He speaks as a friend to a friend.

To be a friend is no light matter. Jesus called His followers His "*friends*" (John 15:15) and THAT forever elevates our concept of friendship.

Right off the bat we notice that Elihu does something for Job that friends do for their friends.

### Speaks As a Friend

#### **Name Calling**

*Job's three friends were addressing an ISSUE*

Sometimes in life, it is easy to miss the most obvious things.

I have been known to miss important, but obvious things. Like when Kathy gets her hair done or re-arranges the furniture in the living room or buys a new dress or a new car or paints the kitchen...

Well, I have read through the speeches of Job a number of times and have never noticed until last week something perfectly obvious.

Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar consistently called Job names. Sinner. Cheat. Scoundrel. From them he got accusation and explanation. One thing they never did, though. They never called him by name.

Contrast that with Elihu. He uses the name his parents gave him - "Job" - nine times in six chapters. That's different.

*Elihu was talking with a PERSON*

At the very beginning, Elihu invites Job to pay attention to what he's saying.

**[33:1] “However now, Job, please hear my speech,  
And listen to all my words.**

A little bit later, he does the same thing again.

**[33:31] “Pay attention, O Job, listen to me;  
Keep silent, and let me speak.**

Then, toward the end of his fourth speech, he does the same thing again.

**[37:14] “Listen to this, O Job,  
Stand and consider the wonders of God.**

Five more times he calls out Job's name while either quoting Job's friends (enemies?),<sup>11</sup> or when quoting Job,<sup>12</sup> or when talking about Job.<sup>13</sup>

And what is he doing by calling Job by name? He's making personal connection.

Now, you may think that this is the shallowest point I've ever made in a sermon. Trust me. I've made shallower points than this. But I really think there is something important here.

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<sup>11</sup> [34:35] *‘Job speaks without knowledge,  
And his words are without wisdom.*

[34:36] *‘Job ought to be tried to the limit,  
Because he answers like wicked men.*

<sup>12</sup> [34:5] *“For Job has said, ‘I am righteous,  
But God has taken away my right;*

<sup>13</sup> [34:7] *“What man is like Job,  
Who drinks up derision like water,*

[35:16] *So Job opens his mouth empty;  
He multiplies words without knowledge.”*

Jesus once said that the shepherd knows his sheep by name (John 10:3). There is something about knowing someone's name that speaks of intimacy and personal relationship and pursuit.

By referring to Job by name he lets Job know that he knows that he's not just addressing an *issue*. He's talking to a *person*.

I don't think he's being manipulative or shrewd. I think he's being sincere.

But, by using his name - Job - Elihu cultivates a receptive frame of mind, so that Job will listen to what he has to say. Calling him by name makes a connection that none of the friends made or even tried to make.

So, here's "shooting fish in a barrel" application for us today. Let's work hard at knowing each other's names. Let's, by all means, give each other permission to fail in this. If you can't think of a name, ask. Even if it's the tenth time. Ask.

If someone asks you your name, you won't be offended, right? At least they're trying!

But, by all means, let's work hard at knowing names. It's not the end-all of relational intimacy, but it is the indispensable first step toward relational warmth and engagement. We don't make much impact if we don't know each other's name. We don't touch deeply when we approach someone with *“Hey, you!”*

In addition to building respect and intimacy saying “Job”, Elihu also made sure that Job knew that he was FOR him. He was not against him.

Let's notice three things Elihu did that fostered that assurance. First, he invited Job to really listen to the liberating truth he has to share.

### **Assures Job That He is FOR HIM**

*Listen to liberating truth (33:1-4)*

**[33:1] “However now, Job, please hear my speech,  
And listen to all my words.**

**[2] “Behold now, I open my mouth,  
My tongue in my mouth speaks.  
[3] “My words are from the uprightness of my heart,  
And my lips speak knowledge sincerely.  
[4] “The Spirit of God has made me,  
And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.**

This is simply an open-handed request for a listening ear. Not, “You’d better listen to what I have to say.” Not, “I DEMAND that you pay attention to me.”

The sense is, “Please give an ear to what I have to say, Job.”<sup>14</sup>

There’s humility about this request.

Elihu assures Job of his sincerity. He makes clear that he’s not out to “get” Job or to deceive him or to take advantage. He’s not trying to pull a fast one. He’s just got a few things to say that he believes are true and that he hopes will help.

Second, he assured Job that he was a safe person.

*A safe wrestling match (vv. 5-7)*

**[5] “Refute me if you can;  
Array yourselves before me, take your stand.  
[6] “Behold, I belong to God like you;  
I too have been formed out of the clay.  
[7] “Behold, no fear of me should terrify you,  
Nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you.**

Elihu gives assurance that Job has nothing to fear from listening to him and engaging with him.

Job has just been verbally abused by his good “friends”. There will be none of that in anything Elihu has to say.

<sup>14</sup> The NASB includes the word “*please*” (so does Peterson’s *The Message*) while some other versions do not (ESV, NIV). In the original language the word is not actually present, but the form in which the sentence is cast in Hebrew makes the presence of “*please*” appropriate.

Rather than fear, he welcomes Job to wrestle with what he has to say. It’ll be perfectly OK to roll his arguments around and see if he can refute them. Critically engage. “*Challenge me, Job. It’s OK. I won’t hurt you.*”

There is no aggression. If anything, Elihu is approaching Job like any of us would approach someone who has just been through a harrowing ordeal. He’s being gentle.

A little bit later, Elihu invites Job and his three friends to “*taste test*” his words, much like you do with food as you walk through H-E-B to decide if you’re going to buy what they have to offer.<sup>15</sup>

**[34:1] Then Elihu continued and said,  
[2] “Hear my words, you wise men,  
And listen to me, you who know.  
[3] “For the ear tests words  
As the palate tastes food.  
[4] “Let us choose for ourselves what is right;  
Let us know among ourselves what is good.**

This is a tremendous display of sympathy. And this sympathetic demeanor is going to help Job feel comfortable hearing and heeding what Elihu has to say.

Third, Elihu goes to great lengths to assure Job that he is out to do good to Job. He is on his side. He wants to help. Elihu promises that he’s going to play the part of an advocate, which is exactly what Job had been longing for.

*An advocate who will “justify” (33:8-12, 31-33)*

### Job longed for an Advocate

Throughout the speeches, Job expresses his desire for someone to have his back, someone to be in his corner. He feels attacked by God and he longs for a strong advocate on his behalf.

<sup>15</sup> Earlier (6:30), Job had used the term “palate” to invite his friends to test (taste) the merits of his case, a challenge they did not accept.

Early on he knows full well that he's not adequate to argue his case before God. He needs someone to help out, someone he refers to as an "umpire"<sup>16</sup>, a "witness" and "advocate"<sup>17</sup>, a "guarantor"<sup>18</sup> of justice, and one who will "justify."<sup>19</sup>

When you're down and almost out, you need an advocate. That's what a defendant needs in court. That's what a patient needs in the hospital.

I don't know if you've ever been in need of an advocate, but Job sure was.

And Elihu, this angry, passionate for God, courageous to speak young man, promises that he'll stand up for Job and serve as his advocate!

Elihu advocates for Job (33:6-7)

**[33:31] "Pay attention, O Job, listen to me; Keep silent, and let me speak.**

**[32] "Then if you have anything to say, answer me; Speak, for I desire to justify you.**

Now, as we will see next week, Elihu doesn't exactly fulfill the role of advocate the way Job envisioned. Job thought that his advocate would prove that he was right and that God was wrong.

Elihu has a slightly different courtroom tactic in mind...

By true words he will serve as the advocate that Job needs, even if he's not the advocate Job expects. He will instruct Job and will lead him into genuine righteousness.

He won't bring Job restoration to his former estate of blessedness. No, he will lead Job to a transformed life of serving the Lord from a purified heart (33:23-28).

If we will be helpful to our friends who are going through tough times we will do everything we can to copy Elihu and convince them that we are for them.

**Conclusion:**

You long to be the touch of God in your friend's life and Elihu points the way forward. No matter your age or station in life -

- KNOW that God intends to use you as His agent in your friend's life;
  - APPROACH your friend as a person, not an issue;
  - ASSURE your friend that you are for her/him;
- and
- ENGAGE your friend with deep, genuine emotional investment.

For a rich relational return, make deep emotional investment. Be personally present.

These are the "tolls" the "dues" we gladly pay for the privilege of speaking powerfully for God into the lives of our friends.

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<sup>16</sup> See 9:33

<sup>17</sup> See 16:19.

<sup>18</sup> See 17:3.

<sup>19</sup> See 33:32.