

The Art and Vocation of Caring for People in Pain
Care-Giving With Job
From God-Talk to God-Presence

Holistic Model for Ministering to People in Pain

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Preface

The book of Job is a story about suffering, human nature, and care-giving that integrates earthy wisdom, mystical profundity, psychological acumen, and dramatic characterizations. In light of the immense suffering that is one of the hallmarks of the twentieth century, it is a story for the times. It is the one book in the Bible, and possibly in all of literature, that is sufficiently universal in scope and values to facilitate ecumenical and secular dialogue on the central psycho-spiritual issues of suffering. One of the admirable aspects of Job as a literary work is that the author was able to communicate so much about a secondary topic, care-giving, as a complement to his main subject, human suffering.

As discussed in a companion work for sufferers, *Where Is God When You Need Him?: Sharing Stories of Suffering with Job and Jesus*, Job is a classic testimony to human potential and the human spirit. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, which in the area of human development is suffering. If you can affirm and build up this link, all other efforts at personal and professional growth will experience a synergistic effect.

Unfortunately, neither in health-care or pastoral care has Job been given the practical attention it deserves. In talking to college and professional health-care educators, I am frequently given the impression that they are unaware of Job's practical relevance to the care-giving ministry. There is a preference for more established paradigms of suffering such as the Kubler-Ross stages of death and dying. While these models are helpful and the research enlightening, they generally focus more on psychological rather than spiritual dimensions of suffering and care-giving. To this extent, they are incomplete and unbalanced, and need to be supplemented.

In interactions with educators in the field of pastoral ministry, I frequently find a preference for complex psycho-spiritual models that lack the earthiness, practicality, and versatility of Job. This preference is puzzling when one considers the impressive list of pastoral and psychological commentators on Job, including St. Gregory the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Buber, Carl Jung, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Jack Kahn, to name a few. It seems prudent to integrate the complex theoretical models used in academia with the practical wisdom of Job.

Readers will note the usage of the masculine pronoun in reference to God. The numerous references made in the book to the interactions between God and Job flow better under this convention; frequent repetition of the divine name God or Lord in lieu of the masculine pronoun becomes awkward. We appreciate the reader's forbearance and understanding on this sensitive issue.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

Care-Giving With Job explores the positive and negative models of care-giving found in Job, while chronicling its dramatization of the psycho-spiritual language of suffering and care-giving. It seeks to demonstrate that a dialogue involving the disciplines of health-care, spirituality, and pastoral care is a necessity that can be conducted in an ecumenical manner. Job is a good starting point for this objective because it communicates through the universal language of story.

Book Structure

Care-Giving With Job is composed of seven chapters with the following objectives:

Chapter one affirms the importance of self-understanding and humility in the care-giving ministry. Efforts to understand, counsel, and support sufferers must also be applied to ourselves. Care-givers draw on their own experience of suffering for inspiration and direction in responding to sufferers.

Chapter two explores the importance of personal meaning in suffering and care-giving, while highlighting the pioneering work of logotherapy.

In chapter three, we will explore two paradigms of care-giving contained in the book of Job. First, we will consider the attitudes and behavior of Job's pious friends, who serve as a provocative negative model of care-giving. By reflecting upon the friends' deficiencies, modern care-givers can grow in awareness of the timeless traps and temptations that arise in ministry to the suffering. We will then examine the book's portrayal of God as a positive model of care-giving. This

revelation is communicated subtly, becoming apparent only by contemplating the story as a whole. By observing God's presence and absence, God's words and silence, we discover an uncomplicated and practical model for being present and helpful to persons in pain.

In chapter four, we will explore the language of suffering and care-giving dramatized by Job. While everyone's experience of suffering and grieving is unique, there are common elements and a general progression that can be observed. In learning this language, care-givers are better equipped to cope with the intense behaviors and questions that arise in situations of suffering.

In chapter five, we will examine the dispositions of trust and integrity as exemplified by the characters in Job. We will look at the possibilities and pitfalls care-givers face in cultivating these much needed virtues.

Chapter six explores the therapeutic benefits of humor for both sufferers and care-givers. We will cite examples from Job which demonstrate that irony and imagination can give rise to humor amid situations of suffering.

Chapter seven concludes our study with practical suggestions for healing and affirming the human spirit through both implicit and explicit use of the book of Job. We will consider the relevance and practical applications of **lectio divina** in both health-care and pastoral care situations.

The appendix includes the Suggestions for Further Reading, information on the "Job Therapy" program on which the book is based.

The author hopes that his work will help the book of Job speak to the hearts of individuals from every culture and creed. Job is the voice of solidarity for caregivers and sufferers. It needs to be heard in today's troubled times.

Chapter One: Where-ever We Go, We Bring Ourselves

The Universal Call for Care-Giving

As we begin our exploration of the psycho-spirituality of suffering and care-giving as dramatized by Job, our ultimate objective is to learn how to do the basics better. These core dispositions and practices include listening, touch, presence, encouragement, prayer or reflection, and the willingness to render humble service. These fundamentals are equally relevant for clergy, family members, friends, therapists, and health-care volunteers and professionals. They apply to the care-taker of the elderly parent as much as to the hospital chaplain. They are necessary for anyone called upon to comfort or assist others in pain. Opportunities for care-giving are present not only in health-care environments, therapy sessions, and in pastoral care situations, but at the office, home, socially, and in daily encounters. The call to care-giving is universal because everyone suffers and encounters others who suffer.

You Can't Give What You Don't Have

There is a Latin proverb "**Nemo dat quod non habet**" which translates as "you can't give what you don't possess." If we want to inspire others to personal meaning, self-esteem, and acceptance, we must be aspiring to these ourselves. We must attend to our own spiritual dimension, life perspective, and emotional health. The ancient proverb "Physician, heal thyself" comes to mind.

Our personal experience and perspective on suffering will influence how we respond to the suffering of others. The more conscious we are of our own attitudes and beliefs, the less likely we will be to project them on sufferers and peers. Before we explore things from the sufferer's perspective, we must first consider the fundamental care-giving disposition, humility.

Humility

As we gain care-giving experience, we gradually discover the necessity and value of humility. However unique and indispensable our contribution, we are agents, not originators, of healing. The art of care-giving is learning to be caring, helpful, and present to sufferers without becoming possessive or obstructive of the healing process.

Conversely, the more centered on ourselves we are, the more intrusive we will be as care-givers. Usually we have to experience first hand the negative consequences of vanity and stubborn self-sufficiency before we learn this valuable lesson. Not surprisingly, humility is a fundamental objective of twelve step spirituality. We can't manage things ourselves, we need to rely in a responsible manner on a higher power. When we lose sight of this truth, we transform ourselves into heroes, martyrs, and eventually scapegoats. We end up

frustrated, guilt-stricken, and confused. Alternatively, when we let go of our egotistical, controlling agenda, and accept the best efforts of ourselves and others, we can make peace with situations of suffering, be it our own or another's. This process of reconciliation is difficult, time-consuming, and at times spiritually draining and heart-breaking.

As demonstrated by Job's friends, care-givers can easily get in the way of the therapeutic process. We are confronted with situations, personalities, and temptations to which we are highly vulnerable. Getting out of the way means that we recognize that we are precious instruments, but not the cure, and that we function best when we focus on others rather than ourselves. This spirit of humble service requires the commitment and cooperation of the whole person.

The Gift of Care-Giving

Care-giving is a gift to both care-giver and sufferer. If we approach sufferers as objects or numbers to be cared for, our services will benefit no one. When we act as if we are doing them a favor, our efforts are stripped of sensitivity and graciousness. Conversely, if we treat sufferers with respect and dignity, and thereby convey our belief that in the gift of themselves they are giving us something precious, we will enhance the process of growth and healing for all concerned.

The books written by and about Mother Teresa of Calcutta are very instructive in this matter. She offers psycho-spiritual insights and practical wisdom from which care-givers can profit. She captures in simple stories, sayings, and images, the fundamental truths that sophisticated textbooks expand into bulky studies and complex theories. Mother Teresa demonstrates that care-givers can incorporate spirituality into their practice without discriminating against those with different beliefs. Fundamental to this capability is a deep

reverence for the dignity, freedom, and uniqueness of every individual. She sets a practical example of holistic care-giving in a pluralistic world. There is power in her words because she lives them, and inspires others to do the same.

Reflection Questions

You Can't Give What You Don't Have

Are there any aspects of care-giving in which you would like to improve and develop?

Describe the care-giving skills, virtues, or practices you would like to cultivate.

What steps, actions, and attitudes can you take to facilitate this growth?

Staying Out of the Way

Are there situations in which you project your weaknesses and unresolved conflicts onto persons in need of care and support? Consider examples from both your professional and personal life.

The Spirit of Service

In what small ways can you render the gift of humble service?