

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 13

"The Problem of Loss"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. There is nothing that is quite as devastating to us as loss. For the most part, these losses generally fit into two categories:
 - A. One would be the loss of people you love.
 1. Joe Bayly quite unexpectedly lost three of his children to death – two of them were teenagers.
 - a. He later wrote a wonderful book entitled "The View from a Hearse," in which he talked about losing significant people in our lives.
 2. Joyce Landorf endured the pain of losing her mother, and decided to share the depths of her sorrow with others going through the same experience. Her beautiful book is titled, "Mourning Song."
 3. In 1982, I lost my mother to the one disease she dreaded the most – cancer.

- a. The family so deeply grieved over her loss, that it was my father's decision to have only the funeral, but to not have the usual graveside internment services following the funeral.
 - b. However, I chose to ride along in the hearse to the cemetery just to be there to say good-bye.
 - c. I stood all alone as her casket was lowered into the grave, watched while they sealed the vault with the heavy cement cover, then stayed until the grave was nearly filled with dirt, then I went to rejoin the rest of the family.
 - d. I just needed to be there.
4. Ten years later I did the same thing following the loss of my father.
 - a. His wish was to have no graveside services following the funeral, so I was the only member of the family to accompany my father's casket to the cemetery in the hearse, and stay there until the burial was nearly complete.
5. The people we lose may be a close family member, a relative, a close friend or working partner.
 - a. But each loss leaves us experiencing that sense of loneliness, and brings us face to face with the frailty of human life.

6. In fact, as I look out in this audience, and as you look up here at me, we are all looking at people who are dying – none of us will live forever.
 - a. Unless the Lord returns first, we will all experience the moment when we take our last breath, then quietly slip from this life into eternity.
 - b. Sooner or later, we will all be there – it's just that some of us will leave sooner, while the rest of us will leave later – but we will all leave.
 - c. And so will someone YOU love.
- B. Another kind of loss is the loss of things we love.
 1. This kind of loss is, in many ways, JUST as painful.
 2. It can be the loss of personal necessities, or the loss of personal benefits, such as:
 - a. The loss of our good health.
 - b. The loss of a job.
 - c. The loss of a desire or a goal or a dream in life.
 - d. The loss of financial security – brought on by the loss of someone we love (through death or even divorce).
 - e. The loss of a home through some natural or man-made disaster.

- f. The loss of personal items that carry sentimental value.
 - g. The list is truly endless.
- C. In this lesson, I want us to take a few moments to look into the life of one man who lost it all.
1. His name is Job, and his story is a painfully familiar one, because he lost BOTH people AND things.
 - a. It's easy to glamorize and immortalize this man who is known for his patience – we often hear about "the patience of Job."
 - b. But I want us to feel with him the awful and terrible blows that come from the loss of people we love and from the loss of things we love.
 2. In this story we're going to see a portrait of REALITY!
 - a. I appreciate the fact that the Bible doesn't try to GLAMORIZE the saints – it tells the truth about them.
 - b. It paints them just like they are.
 - c. When they act as men and women of God, it reveals them as such.
 - d. But when they fail and fall short, it portrays that as well.
 3. We're going to be allowed to see the REALITY of what it means to lose everything and the REALITY of what it means to sit on the ash-heap in confusion and doubt.

BODY:

- I. Lets begin by taking a look at the spiritual and material inventory of this great man of God – Job. **(Job 1:1-4)**
 - A. Look at all Job is credited for being and having.
 1. Here is a man who is "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil!"
 - a. You can't get much better than that!
 - b. He was one of those incredible men of God who served God faithfully all the days of his life.
 2. He also had a large family.
 - a. Seven sons and three daughters – ten children in all.
 - b. He was truly blessed by God for having a "full quiver."
(Psalms 127:3-5)
 3. He also had abundant possessions.
 - a. His livestock numbered seven-thousand sheep, three-thousand camels, five-hundred yoke of oxen, five-hundred female donkeys.
 - b. He also had servants by the dozens.
 4. He also had prestige.

- a. The ancient Hebrew text says Job was the "greatest" of all the men of the East.
 - b. People everywhere knew about Job.
 - (1). Most biblical scholars believe that Job lived during the time of the patriarchs (because of the fact that he offered sacrifices on behalf of his family), and that he may very well have been a contemporary of Abraham.
 - (2). But, regardless of when he lived, his name was a household word.
- B. Job was a godly man who took good care of his family.
1. Here is a father who continually prays for his children, even though they were grown on living on their own.
 - a. No doubt, he had a close relationship with his children.
 2. And, from the fact that all of his children were enjoying each other's company in the house of their older brother, suggests these kids all loved each other as well.
 - a. That's the sign of a spiritually healthy family, where all the children love being with their brothers and sisters.
- C. The Scriptures don't tell us anything about Job's health, his age, or his business.

1. All we're told is that he was a man who lived in comfort, who was prosperous and who was a secure man of God.
 - a. It's a real temptation to say, "Well, who wouldn't be faithful to God with a life-style like that?"
 - (1). He had a hedge of security all around him!
 - (2). Who wouldn't stand with the Lord under those circumstances?
2. That's exactly the charge that Satan brought against Job. (**Job 1:6-11**)

- II. So, the Lord allows Satan to do his evil work against this man of God.
 - A. In one terrible, traumatic moment (all occurring within the span of a single day) Job suffered the loss of nearly everything – both PEOPLE he loved, and the THINGS he loved.
 1. Listen carefully as disaster strikes this man of God in wave after wave, until he finally collapses in total grief. (**Job 1:13-19**)
 - a. Blow after crushing blow came down on this man with all the force of hell behind it.
 - b. One moment, he is secure, comfortable and safe. The next moment, everything he worked so hard to achieve is gone.

- c. And worse yet, his sons and daughters are all killed – all ten dying in the same disaster, WITHOUT ANY WARNING!

B. But, notice his response. **(Job 1:20-21)**

1. He DIDN'T fling his fist in the face of God and say, "How could you do this to me?"
2. Neither did he submerge himself in self-pity, feeling God has treated him unjustly.
3. Instead, he lifted his tear-stained face toward heaven and cried out, "BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD!"

C. It's easy for us to forget that Job was NOT some SUPER-HUMAN SAINT.

1. He was simply a man of God.
2. But his lifestyle was so closely linked to God that disaster after disaster didn't get him sidetracked.
3. Did he grieve?
 - a. The rest of the book tells us he did.
4. But he didn't blame or accuse God.
 - a. This tells me that through the power of God we can also hold fast when the waves of disaster strike us time after time.
 - (1). When we lose our mate, or our children, or our mother or father to death.

(2). When we loose our jobs or our financial security, or our homes.

(3). When we loose a relationship, or see a marriage break into a million pieces, or watch helplessly as a romance goes "over the edge."

III. Well, some might be tempted to say at a time like this, "At lease you got your health!" But Job lost that too.

A. Satan's hate-filled work was not finished yet. **(Job 2:4-8)**

1. It's difficult to fully appreciate the terrible disease that afflicted Job, until we look at the symptoms Job experienced.

a. First, there was inflammation accompanied by intense itching.

(Job 2:7-8)

b. Then there were ulcers that became infected with maggots.

(Job 7:5)

c. This was followed by horrible nightmares. **(Job 7:14)**

d. Then came pain and inflammation to the bones. **(Job 30:17)**

e. Finally came the time when his rotting, blackened flesh began falling off. **(Job 30:30)**

B. What a TRAGIC picture.

1. From the top of his head to the soles of his feet, Job is covered with oozing, itching, maggot infested ulcers.
 - a. The only relief he can get is to sit in a pile of ashes, scratching himself with pieces of broken pottery.

- C. When you experience a loss, have you ever wondered why God leaves **SOME** things **BEHIND** and **TAKES** others?
 1. In Job's case, God left Job's wife.
 - a. If he hasn't suffered enough, she turns to him in his agony with this piece of advice – "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" **(Job 2:9)**
 - b. **WHO NEEDS THAT KIND OF ADVICE?**
 2. Job responds to his wife with what I consider to be one of the most profound verses in the entire Bible. **(Job 2:10)**
 - a. We are so **READY** to accept the blessings from God, aren't we?
 - (1). When things are going great, we're on top of the world.
 - b. But how "ready" are we to accept adversity when God allows it to come our way?
 - (1). Does our fleshly nature come to the surface and we find ourselves thinking God is unfair, unkind and unloving?

(2). Do we challenge His "right" to interfere with our happiness this way?

3. Listen to the advice given in Job to those who are suffering from calamities – advice from Job's friend Eliphaz. **(Job 5:17-22)**
 - a. God's great goal is NOT for us to be free from loss – to be comfortable or satisfied, or live out our lives in constant peace and joy, where there is no calamity, or evil, or hardships.
 - b. God's great goal is that we become more like Jesus Christ -- to mold us into the character of Jesus.
 - c. How is that accomplished? Through suffering, pain and sorrows.
 - d. That's how our faith is purified and made more precious than gold. **(James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:3-7)**
4. When you suffer a loss (regardless of what that loss may be), it **DOES NOT NECESSARILY** mean that you were disobedient.
 - a. In fact, it MAY mean that you are in the VERY CENTER of God's will – just like Job!
 - b. It MAY be that God is purifying you even more than you already are, so that you can come even closer to the image of Jesus Christ.
 - c. Why?

(1). Those who undergo tremendous losses and come through that experience are drawn even closer to God.

(2). When unbelievers see the character of Jesus Christ pour out of a life that has been ravaged by tragedy – it speaks LOUDER and CLEARER than any sermon I, or any other preacher, could ever hope to preach.

D. But, let's be honest. When tragedy strikes, we look for God in the whole event (we look for His purpose and His presence), but we often don't see Him.

1. Job admitted that. **(Job 23:8-9)**
2. If you've been through times like this, you know EXACTLY what Job is talking about.

IV. So, what can we learn from Job that will help give us all the right perspective when tragedy strikes.

A. Let's all remember this one thing – even though we may not understand what's happening, nor why, GOD KNOWS THE WAY! Listen to Job.

(Job 23:10-14)

1. When this verse says, "He performs what is appointed for me," do you realize what we have to do?
2. We have to change our entire perspective.

- a. You and I need to understand that He has a PURPOSE for what we're experiencing.
 - b. It may very well be that we are experiencing a LOSS NOW, so that it will lead to a GAIN LATER.
3. The Lord allowed Job to suffer the loss of all he had, but the Lord later blessed his life two-fold.
- a. Job later received DOUBLE what he had before, as far as his material possessions were concerned.
 - b. And, Job was also blessed with children once again -- the exact number he lost in that terrible tragedy.
4. Don't jump to conclusions – this DOESN'T mean that if you loose a \$30,000 or \$40,000 job, that God is going to bless you with a \$60,000 job later.
- a. The Lord's blessings are not always TANGIBLE or MEASURABLE in dollars and cents.
5. When the Lord rewards after a loss, He builds internal character traits.
- a. He gives a deeper sense of His power and might, and grants us a deeper peace of mind.
 - b. He also gives us security, purpose, and a renewed direction.

- c. He gives us understanding, a compassionate heart, and wisdom.
- d. These are things money can't buy.

CONCLUSION:

- I. How would you respond if God allowed you to go through the same kind of intense trials as He did with Job?
 - A. It's been said, "there is a story behind every hymn."
 - 1. One of the most beautiful stories of trusting faith in the midst of trials is found in one of the songs we often sing. Allow me to take a moment and read the story – the story of H. G. Spafford.
 - 2. The French liner, "S.S. Ville du Havre," was the most luxurious ship afloat when it sailed from New York in November, 1873. Among her passengers was Mrs. H. G. Spafford of Chicago. She and her husband had planned to travel to Europe with their four young daughters for a much needed vacation. But Mr. Spafford was not able to make the voyage with his family because of business commitments in Chicago, which had just two years before been ravaged by the Great Fire of 1871. So, Mr. Spafford told his wife and daughters "Goodbye," promising to meet them in France in a few weeks.

At two o'clock on the morning of November 22, 1873, when the luxury liner was several days out, she was rammed by the English iron sailing vessel, the "Lochern." In less than 30 minutes, the "Ville Du Havre," one of the largest ships afloat, slipped beneath the waves, carrying with her some 226 souls, including the four Spafford children. Fortunately, Mrs. Spafford was pulled from the water by sailors from the "Lochern," along with a small handful of survivors.

News of the tragedy soon reached New York and spread across the country in the matter of hours. H. G. Spafford learned of the disaster and waited anxiously for days to hear of his family's fate. Nine days after the mid-ocean shipwreck, when the survivors

landed at Cardiff, Wales, Mrs. Anne Spafford cabled her husband these two words, "Saved alone."

What makes this true story so incredible is that the Spafford's had lost everything they owned in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and just a year before that they lost their only son to yellow fever. Now, in a tragedy at sea he lost his four precious daughters.

As soon as he could, Spafford booked passage on a ship to Europe to join his grieving wife. On the way over, just weeks after the tragedy, the Captain of called Spafford into his cabin and said, "I believe we are now passing over the place where the 'Ville du Havre' went down."

That night Spafford found it impossible to sleep. So in his cabin, there in the mid-Atlantic, he took out pin and paper. And out of a heart shattered by unbearable grief, but a soul still clinging to faith, H. G. Spafford wrote these words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

3. But the story of H. G. Spafford's loss doesn't end here. One of his dearest friends was Philip Paul Bliss (P. P. Bliss), a famous song leader and composer, who had written many wonderful hymns that we still sing today -- "Hallelujah! What A Savior," "I Will Sing of My Redeemer," "Let The Lower Lights Be Burning," "Almost Persuaded," "More Holiness Give Me," "Whosoever Will," "Wonderful Words of Life," and more than a hundred others.

Phillip Bliss thought it would be a wonderful tribute to Spafford's daughters if the poem Spafford had written was set to music and made a hymn. Spafford was deeply moved and agreed to his friend's request, and in the matter of days, Phillip Bliss had set the poem "It Is Well With My Soul," to music. The song became an immediate success, and was soon being sung in churches all across the Northeast.

On December 29, 1876, Bliss and his devoted wife Lucy were traveling by train from New York to Chicago. They had just spent

a wonderful Christmas with family at their home in Rome, New York. But since the trip to Chicago would be a lengthy, Philip and Lucy Bliss left their two children with other family members, while they made the trip to Chicago alone.

Shortly after 8:00 p.m., the train carrying Mr. and Mrs. Bliss began slowly crossing the 100 foot high trestle over the Ashtabula river in Ohio. Without warning, the trestle collapsed sending eleven rail cars plunging into the icy ravine below. The cars immediately burst into flames from ruptured kerosene-heating stoves that had warmed the passengers on that cold December night. Before the night would end, over 100 of the 160 passengers would perish, and many of those that survived would later die from their injuries.

Witnesses said Philip Bliss was thrown free of the wreckage and, though seriously injured, immediately began a desperate search for his beloved wife. Suddenly, he realized Lucy was still trapped in the burning passenger car. Unable to free her from the twisted wreckage, Bliss sat down beside his beloved Lucy, wrapped his arms around her and perished in the flames by her side. Philip Bliss was 38 years old.

4. When tragedy and disaster strike your life, and it will someday, will you be able to look heavenward and say, "Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul?'"
5. I know of only one way we can have the ability to stand in the face of terrible loss, and that's to have our faith firmly rooted in Jesus Christ and the promises He has given us of eternal life.