

1

Some of you may remember a television commercial years ago when a teacher asked a child to recite the alphabet. The girl began, “A, B, C, D, E, F...E. F. Hutton,” and then all the children jump out of their desks and lean forward to listen, with the announcer saying, “When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen.”

It was a popular marketing phrase for this investment firm, which began in 1904 with Edward Francis Hutton and his brother, and during the 1970s and 80s, this commercial gave a feeling of trust, that one could safely invest their money with this group. But in “in 1985 [they] pleaded guilty to 2,000 counts of mail and wire fraud, and paid more than \$10 million in penalties... The firm would make bank withdrawals and deposits in such a way that it gained illegal access to millions of dollars interest free for days at a time while waiting for the checks to clear.”<sup>1</sup>

I guess no one’s listening to E. F. Hutton now.

Sometimes it’s difficult to know whom to listen to, and recently we’ve had so many mixed

messages: at first some suggested wearing masks was not a good idea, but later we heard that wearing masks could slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Some school districts have said it is safe to return to school, while others have suggested that online learning is best.

Some suggest we should vote by mail for the next Presidential election, while others try to convince us that voting by mail is not secure.

To whom to we listen? That’s a question we have to discern almost daily, as did Job when his friends came to offer him advice about his suffering. As we have discovered over the past several weeks exploring the story of Job, several friends suggested that Job suffered due to his sin, or maybe his family’s mistakes, for his friends had to find someone to blame.

That’s so tempting, isn’t it? To blame someone. It must be someone’s fault. You may have even heard the numerous conspiracy theories floating around the internet, such as the virus was

intentionally created or escaped from a research lab, was devised as population control, or even related to 5G mobile phone networks.<sup>2</sup> Some have a tendency to use tragedies and chaos to create false explanations, knowing the public is hungry for someone to blame.

Maybe that's because we're afraid to admit that life has some randomness to it, that accidents do happen, that chaos can unexpectedly occur, that the universe is not always a safe place. We want to believe that everything is ordered and under control, that God has everything planned to prevent us from suffering.

And when we encounter suffering, we need someone to blame, anyone to hold responsible, so that we can make sense of the world.

That's what Job's friends had been doing, trying to make sense of their world. They believed that good people would not suffer, and when their good friend suffered, they tried to make sense of it by blaming him.

Job lamented, crying out to God, seeking to understand why he was suffering, and then God shows up in the midst of a whirlwind, a storm, and when God speaks, Job listens. Job may have felt like his life had become a whirlwind itself, filled with pain and confusion, so God's response in a whirlwind may have blended in with Job's emotions. Sometimes it's hard to hear God when our lives seem to be falling apart, but even in the storms of life, we may catch a glimmer of hope, a sparkle of light on the horizon, a sense that we're not alone.

And when Job listened, he heard a series of questions from God:

- “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?” (38:4, CEB)
- “while the morning stars sang in unison?” (38:8, CEB)
- “when I made the clouds,” brought forth rain and guided the stars? (38:8ff, CEB)
- “Do you know when mountain goats give birth; do you observe the birthing of does?” (39:1, CEB)

3

- “Did you give strength to the horse, clothe his neck with a mane?” (39:19, CEV)
- “Did you teach hawks to fly south for the winter? Did you train eagles to build their nests on rocky cliffs?” (39:26-28 CEV)

At first this may seem like a strange response from God, with some interpreters suggesting that God was scolding Job for asking questions about suffering in the presence of a mighty God, but I don't think that's what was happening here. I suggest that God is not one who tries to make Job feel small and insignificant. Instead, I think God is striving to point out that in the vastness of the universe, life is complex, and sometimes it's hard for us to see the bigger picture, as when Private Zero confesses to Beetle Bailey in the comic strip: “They say the universe is like a billion years old. And life on Earth began like a million years ago. I kinda feel like I've missed out on a few things.”<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes we may feel as though we've missed out on something, that we don't quite understand everything, such as why good people suffer.

Sometimes we wish we could make sense of life right now, feeling impatient with the complexity of world that doesn't always make sense. We may grow tired of waiting, as was the case with

A woman [who] placed an order with a large mail order company. Several weeks later she received this response: “Thank you for your order. Recent improvements in our shipping procedures may cause a delay in shipping.”<sup>4</sup>

Improvements creating a delay? That just doesn't make any sense, does it? When we encounter delays, sometimes we may become impatient, even with God. While reading the story of Job, some may wonder why God doesn't reply until the 38<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book, feeling impatient while listening to Job's friends go on and on. Some may feel that God doesn't care, but maybe the delay indicates that God was pondering Job's questions seriously, contemplating the best way to respond to a difficult situation. If God had appeared too quickly in the story, making everything better and offering easy answers, none of us would be able to relate,

④

for in reality, we often struggle a long time before making sense of a difficult situation.

We know what it's like to wait a long time, especially now in a pandemic. Many have felt unsettled for the past five months, wondering when this will end. The story of Job reminds us that when we wait, God waits with us, listening to our questions, struggling along beside us as we strive to sort out the complexities of the world. In the silence and during what may feel like chaos...listen. For when God speaks, we have an opportunity to draw closer to God, to express our fear and our hopes, knowing that in time, life will get better, for God remains among us.

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Kadlec, "Shhh...E.F. Hutton Is Talking Again," <https://money.com/ef-hutton-gateway/>, 3/24/15.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_conspiracy\\_theories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_conspiracy_theories)

<sup>3</sup> 8/21/20.

<sup>4</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #750.