

Why do good people suffer?

Job 7 (Selected verses)

Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a labourer? So I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, 'When shall I rise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?'

The Book of Job is one of the most intriguing, even baffling, books in the Old Testament. Despite the grandeur of its poetry and prose, its story is almost commonplace; the plight of an innocent man who has lost everything for no apparent reason. Job is asking the one question which is central to the human condition and to coming to terms with suffering and loss: 'Why do good people suffer?' It is a question which we all need to ask if we are to forge any kind of truthful relationship with God .

Can you identify with this passage? Have you ever felt like this?

Have you ever dared to argue or fight back in prayer?

Are 'negative feelings' towards God acceptable?

The God who Job was used to was one who had to be obeyed through the keeping of laws and the observance of ritual.

What is your God like?

Job is mystical theology – the stripping away of all false knowledge and the false religion which springs from it, to a knowledge of God which leaves us without words, as it did, in the end, with Job.

Job does not doubt God, but he does defend his right to argue with him and to question religion itself. In so doing, he is reacting to all that is false in the religion of his day. Today he would be resisting the kind of rules and customs which get in the way of a truthful relationship with God.

The book of Job obliges us to re examine our priorities when it comes to our own faith journey and to question ways of thinking which have become 'set', including our ideas about truth.

What connections can you make about your ideas of God and the way you pray?

Do you think that it is possible to encounter God without words or formal structures? What might seeking to know God in 'not knowing' him mean for your life?

Is it possible to love a God who allows suffering? How do you feel about God in the light of the suffering being experienced by so many people in the world?

Does this affect the way you pray?