

1-1-2005

It's Not About You

Alfred Darryl Jumper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jumper, Alfred Darryl (2005) "It's Not About You," *Leaven*: Vol. 13: Iss. 3, Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol13/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.

It's Not About You

ALFRED DARRYL JUMPER

When I consider all the scriptures that have been used to offer hope to the hopeless, faith to those at the end of their rope, and encouragement to the downtrodden, it's hard to put a finger on a single passage and recognize it as my favorite. Perhaps my dilemma is rooted in the existentialism that has, I freely admit, found root in my soul. The truth is that I find that my "favorite" passage today might well not be my "favorite" tomorrow because my circumstances change. But through all of life's changes and all the difficulties I have faced, there does remain one passage that has sustained me and shaped my ministry in recent years. "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42.10).

Several months ago I completed a study of Hebrews with a Sunday school class I am privileged to teach. While taking time off after teaching that course, I struggled with the question of what to teach next. Several class members suggested that we study Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*, which I, incidentally, had already begun to read. My first response was an unqualified "No." While I did find the book interesting, I didn't view it as particularly academic or scholarly (two qualities that I recognize as imperative for any material that I would like to present to the class for study). But the call to study that book didn't go away. Instead, it intensified as others continued to suggest it. Reluctantly I acquiesced and agreed to teach the class, using *The Purpose Driven Life* as our text. In preparation for teaching, I started reading the book again. It was in the second reading that I saw something that had completely escaped me the first time. Right there on the very first page, before the writer began his first paragraph, were the words, "It's not about you."

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Why had I missed that? Why did it not reach out and grab me the first time I read it? How could I let slip past me this expression of the one thing that has shaped and molded my ministry in recent years? Indeed, the very essence of ministry requires, first and foremost, a recognition that it's not about you. Effective ministry must necessarily focus, not on the minister and his or her needs, but rather, on those ministered to and their needs. Hard as I try, God still needs to remind me on occasion that it's not about me. The message God gives us in the book of Job, particularly in the tenth verse of the forty-second chapter, brings the point home in a comforting, albeit painful, way. It is a message that has become significant in my own life. In recent years two unfortunate events in my personal life reinforced my understanding that it's not about me.

On Jan. 28, 2002, the oldest of my four brothers passed away. To lose a brother, particularly when he is the first sibling to die, is extremely difficult and unlike anything I've faced before or since. The funeral service started out in typical fashion, with many comforting remembrances of the ways my brother had touched the lives of those who were kind enough to share their stories. As the service progressed, however, the mood changed from reserved laughter to tears, and to other open expressions of grief. We are people of faith. Why would our grief seem so inconsolable? I suspect that the finality of death is something that we simply cannot

comprehend. Job struggled with this very issue and concluded, “. . . mortals die and are laid low; humans expire and where are they? As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep” (Job 14.10-12). Although it appears that Job acknowledges the finality of death, he still grieves. How does one move beyond such grief?

A little less than two years ago my wife and I struggled with a personal tragedy that tested the very foundation of our relationship. We cried and prayed and sought answers as hours turned into days and days into weeks. Realizing that the issue was more than we could handle alone, we turned to two couples who have always been there for us in times of need and who, we were sure, would help us. Their wise counsel was never more needed or appreciated. One of them was kind enough to send me a copy of Stormie Omartian’s *The Power of a Praying Husband*. Very early in the book the writer says that the one thing every woman wants to hear, that will make her feel more loved than anything else, is “I’m praying for you today.” I must admit that prior to reading that book my focus in prayer had been on us a couple, and even me, but never did I focus my prayers on her individually. I considered the author’s claim, took her advice, and before going off to work the next morning, I hugged my wife and said to her, “I’m praying for you.” I went to work that morning feeling better than I had in days, and I realize now that when I stopped concentrating on my own feelings and started praying for my wife, that marked the beginning of a long road to recovery. We are still on the right path, and that brings us back to Job.

JOB PRAYS FOR HIS FRIENDS

The book of Job is very familiar and Job’s life, his trials, and his perseverance have been chronicled repeatedly from our pulpits. Indeed, the book of Job is a favorite among ministers because of its ability to engage the audience and cause the listener to reflect on his or her personal and present life challenges. We identify with Job at one point or another in our lives. I personally think of the book as one of the more important in scripture because it leads us to a clearer understanding of many of life’s most basic issues.

Because of the book’s popularity, we are as familiar with Job as we are any other person mentioned in the Old Testament. We know about his wealth, his family, his righteousness, and the fact that his fellow citizens respected him. We also know about his patience, his perseverance, and his pain. What must not be overlooked in this story, however, is the relationship between Job and his friends, particularly Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These relationships are essential to understanding how the book of Job concludes and, more importantly, why God allows Job to go through the things he suffers. All three men argue one way or another that the cause of Job’s suffering is some dark sin that Job has committed. Eliphaz reminds Job that God is pure and righteous and that man brings trouble on himself. Bildad is more argumentative than Eliphaz, and accuses Job of godlessness. Finally, Zophar bluntly reminds him that God knows iniquity when he sees it; and then this judgmental friend charges Job with boasting. In response, Job rejects their claims and simply recounts his own godly life. In his grief, three times Job challenges God to appear and talk to him face to face; and, as the book builds to its climax, this is exactly what God does. He humbles Job and rebukes Job’s friends, making it clear that their arguments are in error. Before he blesses Job, however, he does something that teaches him one of the most important lessons he is to learn from the entirety of his suffering. God instructs Job to pray for his friends. It is not until Job prays for his friends that God blesses him! I can tell you from personal experience that it takes an abundant outpouring of grace to be able to pray for your friends, particularly when you have been emotionally scarred by their false accusations.

. . . the one thing every woman wants to hear, that will make her feel more loved than anything else, is “I’m praying for you today.”

Reflecting on the aforementioned personal tragedies in my life, I am convinced that God used both events to teach me the same lessons he taught Job. At my brother's funeral, weeping and grieving friends and relatives surrounded me. Even so, it wasn't until I was able to dry my eyes, take my focus off myself and reach out in comfort and support to those grieving around me that I began to get the upper hand on my personal battle with grief. It was as though God had once again said to me, "It's not about you." Similarly, when my wife and I found ourselves in a place where the very foundation of our relationship was being tested, it wasn't until I was able to set aside my own feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and frustration and to pray for her that I gained a sense that my burden was being lifted. The story of Job expresses what I have learned from my experiences: four of the most powerful words we can ever speak to one another are "I'm praying for you." May God keep us in his care as we strive to understand that it's not about us. May he teach us, as he did Job so long ago, to pray for our friends.

ALFRED DARRYL JUMPER

Dr. Jumper is a medical doctor and worships with the Crenshaw Church of Christ, Los Angeles, California.

