

My college roommate once told me that she was never going to have any children under the age of 10. She never enjoyed hanging around with or babysitting any small children and figured that they were too much bother anyway. I told her I thought this was a bit pre-mature, considering she didn't even have a boyfriend yet, but she was set in her ways: "When I do get one and he asks me to marry him, I'll just tell him that I will marry him on one condition—no children under the age of 10." I laughed.

"The diapers, the crying, the spit up, the whining—who wants to deal with any of that?"

I replied, "Good luck!"

I wonder if God ever thought that of us as God's children—tired of us, not wanting all the mess and crying and bother—wanting us to just grow up and be done with it.

As we spend our third week on the story of Job after chapters and chapters of God being silent we finally hear the voice of God. Job has endured the death of his ten children and now suffers an agonizing disease giving him excruciating sores all over his body. He has been counseled by his three so-called friends that he needs to take some responsibility for his condition, that he needs to admit that he has done something to deserve all this punishment. A fourth voice, that of a young man named Elihu, tries to convince Job that no one has ever been able to dispute with God, so Job's demand that he see God face to face is inappropriate. Humans will find true wisdom, contends Elihu, in the reverence and fear of God.

Elihu also suggests that the reason Job cannot hear God's message is that Job isn't humble enough. He tells Job to accept God's discipline, confess the sin of pride, and focus on God's power in humility.

When God finally speaks, it is out of a whirlwind (representative of God's power and might) and begins a long list of rhetorical questions meant to demonstrate that God is God and we are not: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements or stretched a line upon it? Who laid its cornerstone?

"Can you lift up your voice to the clouds so that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are?' Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the water skins of the heavens when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together?"

The message seems to be: we do not have the power or ability to do what God has always done. God is God and we are not. Only God has been, is now, and will be forever the Creator and preserver of all of life.

God's speech seems to be designed to put Job in his place, to show Job who's the boss, who's in power, who's the one in control.

When I read the passage again this week, this passage from Job actually reminded me of what sometimes sound like when I am upset with my kids. God sounds a little like the tape that plays through my head when I've simply had enough. Perhaps you've had something like this tape running through your head, too. It sounds something like this:

'Who cleans for you and cooks for you and washes the dishes and takes out the garbage and feeds the dog for you? And, by the way, who went through 15 hours of

labor for you and nursed you and changed your diapers and got up every night, sometimes several times in the night, for six months in a row? And now you want me to get up and get you a glass of milk when you are perfectly able to get it yourself. Who are you to ask me to do such a thing?’

(I don’t actually say it. And most days I’m not so crabby. But some days—some days I really wish I could say such things.)

That’s what God sounds like to me in this passage—an angry, upset and fed up parent who has had just about enough.

Now just because God is fed up with Job doesn’t mean that God wants to be rid of the man or finished with their relationship. It just means that God is fed up.

We all get fed up at one time or another with those we love. God could have remained indifferent and distant and aloof throughout the book of Job, but God chooses to engage in the conversation and give Job a little taste of the perspective of the Almighty. God bothers to talk with Job because God loves him enough to give him that perspective.

It reminds me of the often-told joke of a man talking with God and saying, “Is it true, God, that a million years are like a second to you?” “Yes, my child.” “And is it also true that a million dollars are like a penny to you?” “Yes, my child.” “Wonderful. Then, if it isn’t too much trouble, could I have a penny?” “Yes, my child. Just a second.”

God has a perspective that is different from ours and when we think that we are the center of the universe, sometimes the most loving thing God can do is make us aware that we are not the be all and end all of everything.

So if we aren’t all that important, at least as important as we think we are, why does God bother with us at all? Why does God even care?

Maybe the answer is that God loves us and cares about us in spite of ourselves. God loves us enough to not leave us where we are, but to encourage our spiritual growth. Maybe the answer is that God wants us to grow up from being children of God to adults of God. Maybe God wants us to grow in our understanding of God so that we can see that with the good comes the bad, that God doesn’t protect us from all ills but that through it all God keeps us close no matter what the circumstance.

Have you ever heard someone say, “I yell at you because I care about you?” It turns out that there’s truth in that. Yelling, though not very loving, does prove that they care enough to engage you at some level. If people didn’t care about something or someone they wouldn’t say anything in the first place—they would just walk away.

The words that God utters show us that God has been listening to Job and his friends all along. Though God does not give an outright answer to Job’s question of why righteous people have to suffer, God gives Job an experience with the living God which brings Job into a new place in his relationship with God.

It is this relationship that transforms Job’s suffering. Job meets God and sees that the track of his life has led him through paths of joy and suffering. Job realizes that in all things he was being held in the hand of God. He was never alone. He had a friend who was much truer to him than the so-called ‘friends’ who came to console him.

Why Does God Bother? by Holly C. W. Aastuen
Job 38:1-7: 34-41 October 18, 2009

And now that Job has heard the voice of God, he knows that not only was he never alone, but that he was never the final say, the final perspective in his life. Up until this point Job was inclined to view creation from his own personal perspective. Upon hearing from God, Job is forced to take a wider perspective, to see things through God's eyes and realize that the world is more vast than he could comprehend or imagine.

A few years out of college my college roommate found true love and married. I kept track of her through our annual Christmas letters and found that she had a son and then a daughter, neither one through adoption. I caught up with her a few years ago and reminded her of her master plan, her plan to have ten year old children right from the start.

She laughed, "Well," she said, "I didn't know as much about life then as I know now. Now I wouldn't trade my kids for the world."

Her thoughts sounded a little like God, "Those children of mine sometimes act as if their lives were entirely up to them. But still, I wouldn't trade them for the world."