RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

*. . . they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him because they saw how great his suffering was.*

Job 2:11-13

The book of Job in the Bible gives an account of a righteous man who faithfully responded to difficult trials. It’s an example of great human suffering and is often held up as a lesson for how supporters should not respond.  
  
When Job’s friends came to visit him in response to his suffering, they started out being compassionate, quietly sitting with their friend with empathy. They responded in the way Henri Nouwen describes would be best in his book [Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life:](https://www.amazon.ca/Out-Solitude-Three-Meditations-Christian/dp/0877934959/ref=asc_df_0877934959/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=706745562934&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=10677692085499238466&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9001529&hvtargid=pla-464495895084&psc=1&mcid=e7d8d61c1f78304b9c4bac4bc130e11c&gad_source=1)  
  
When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.  
  
Some thoughtful and sympathetic advice from Eugene Peterson in the introduction to [The Message](https://www.amazon.ca/s?k=the+message+by+eugene+peterson&i=stripbooks&hvadid=666852115390&hvdev=c&hvlocphy=9001529&hvnetw=g&hvqmt=b&hvrand=7290972445662414229&hvtargid=kwd-296520902149&hydadcr=2906_13694341&tag=googcana-20&ref=pd_sl_9owob0nis8_b):  
  
“. . . instead of continuing to focus on preventing suffering—which we simply won’t be very successful at anyway—perhaps we should begin entering the suffering, participating insofar as we are able—entering the mystery and looking around for God…we need to learn from them (people who suffer) and—if they will let us—join them in protest and prayer….shared suffering can be dignifying and life-changing.”  
  
Love and compassion are the operative words. That’s what our friends who suffer most need from us. That’s how we can start them on the road to feeling better. And Jesus can show us how.  
  
There’s nothing like knowing you have the empathy of friends.  
  
marja