

Amid the heroes, villains, prophets and brave women of the Hebrew Scriptures, two characters stand out as archetypes of suffering: Job, whose misadventures and dialogue with God make up the epic poem that is the Book of Job, and the Suffering Servant found deep in the prophetic book of Isaiah.



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Job is a fictional character, but he was as familiar to people of the ancient world as Atticus Finch and Harry Potter are to us. Job became the spoils in a dispute between God and Satan when God held up Job as an exemplar of goodness.

Hah! says Satan, anyone would be good as long as You prosper the righteous and punish the wicked. Give Job a hardship or two, and he will curse You, Satan taunts.

Have at him, says God. And in short order, Job suffers tragedy after tragedy until he is stripped of wealth, health, children and servants. Job never confesses to sins others think he must have committed, never even asks for a reprieve. What he wants, demands, is an explanation from God about why he had to suffer. When God finally grants Job the dialogue he asks for, God's power, wisdom and goodness resound, but there is no answer to the question, "Why?"

The Suffering Servant, who figures in the book of Isaiah, also is a fictional character. Unlike Job, who is the constant protagonist in the book that bears his name, this sufferer has neither a name nor an identity. Is he the prophet Isaiah himself, an amalgam of long-suffering Hebrew prophets, the personification of Israel, or the foreshadowing of the Messiah? All this and more, say some scholars.

Job has many memorable lines in the course of his undoing. The Suffering Servant, on the other hand, has no lines. His tale is told for him by the author of Isaiah, who has something important to say about the role of suffering for God's chosen people.

When Job asks why, he wants God to explain why He allowed such terrible things to happen to him, an innocent and righteous man. When the question of Why? comes up for the Suffering Servant, it isn't to seek an *accounting* of unfortunate events, but rather to identify a long-ordained *purpose* for the suffering — he was to be "pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins." How he suffers — "spurned and avoided, a man of suffering accustomed to infirmity, thought of as one smitten by God, like a lamb to the slaughter,

harshly treated yet he submitted and opened not his mouth, oppressed and condemned" — describes how the purpose may have to be fulfilled.

In Catholic health care, we focus on the Hows. How do we relieve suffering to the extent we are able? Michael Brescia, MD, identifies the forms and stages of suffering among incurably ill people approaching death and discusses Calvary Hospital's commitment to palliative relief for each of them.

How do we understand the particular affliction of loneliness as it impacts the health of those among us who already are vulnerable? Fr. Gerald Arbuckle explores the deleterious effects of social alienation and suggests ways to disrupt the isolation.

How do we use technology to address the torment suffered by veterans with PTSD? Patrick McGrath presents AMITA Health's work with simulators to help servicemen and women break down the terrible memories they bring back to civilian life.

Job's suffering was intense, but in the end, it was a short-term detour in a longer life of prosperity and meaning. Not so for the Suffering Servant. The Lord who created and formed him — who called him by name and claimed him as his own (Isaiah 43:1) — had been grooming him all along to be the servant who would suffer.

The character of Job lives in all of us. Our voices echo his when we cry out at the injustice of a job eliminated, an unexpected diagnosis, a child lost to addiction, or when we approach death with pain and confusion.

The character of the Suffering Servant finds us when we hear the call to become servant leaders. If we listen closely, we know the call is not simply to lead, but likely to suffer — near the bedside, with the caretakers, in the negotiations of a challenged ministry, and at the crux of Catholic identity.

The mystery of suffering will remain a mystery. As much as we want an accounting of why we suffer, we will get no more answer than did Job. How to relieve suffering, how to prevent it, how to build resilience and compassion, how to innovate, how to find purpose and share meaning around the suffering we can't escape are the concerns of Catholic health care.

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