Living in Job's House

By Paul David Tripp

My dad was a hard-working man but he never saw much for his work. He didn't make a lot of money and we didn't live in a great neighborhood. We never had a big house. Despite all of this, he managed to save enough money for his first, brand-new car. He was such an excited man. He bought a two-toned, 1959 Plymouth Belvedere, peach-colored, with pearl white trim. Two-toned cars were cool. This car had those big fins. It looked like a plane with an identity complex. It was a funny-looking car, but he was proud of it. It had push button automatic. You just press a button on the dash, and it would go. They don't make cars like that anymore.

He brought that car home on a Friday afternoon. Our whole family walked around that car, admiring its beauty. He let me, a nine-year old boy, sit in the driver's seat and hold that great big white steering wheel. I thought, "It doesn't get any better than this!" He said, "Saturday morning, we're going for a ride, and I'm going to sign us up for AAA." He had dreams of driving that car around the country on family road trips using marked maps from AAA. When we got up Saturday morning, he was in a celebratory mood, so he took us out for some good, old-fashioned, handmade donuts. He beamed as he looked out the window of that donut shop at his shiny new car parked alongside the curb. This car had power! It had push-button automatic! You could see the look of pride on his face. *Fifty-nine Plymouth Belvedere. I made it! Finally, there's something I can see for all my years of hard work.*

We were proud of Dad and we were proud of that car. We got back in the car and headed toward the AAA building in downtown Toledo, Ohio. He wheeled that brand new, 1959, peach-colored and pearl-trimmed, big-finned Plymouth Belvedere into the AAA lot, got blinded by the morning sun…and totaled that car on a lamppost in the middle of the parking lot. You have never seen such a slump-shouldered man. He slogged to the front door of AAA to call for help, only to discover that it was closed on Saturdays. My dad stood in front of his one-day old car that he had just destroyed. With fists clenched, he said, "What in the world is going on? This doesn't make any sense!"

His comment wasn't just about that car. It was about years of hard work, and thinking he would finally get something for all that he had done. It was about how life doesn't work out. And, yes, it was about a brand new car, destroyed before he ever got a chance to take that first trip with a AAA marker map.

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I sat in my office on a Tuesday afternoon

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talking with Jack, and thinking, *There's something terribly wrong here.* Jack was angry, confused, and lost. I dipped into Jack's life and tried to get his story out spoonful by spoonful. He just couldn't take more than a spoonful at a time. I've never had an experience quite like that. His story wrenched my heart and I wept.

Jack was blind and crippled. But Jack wasn't born blind and he wasn't born crippled. When he was born, Jack was a healthy baby boy. But his twin sister came out of the womb tragically deformed. Something snapped in Jack's mom's mind; some twisted thing that we'll never understand or be able to wrap words around. Somehow, some way, she was convinced that this deformity was Jack's fault. She assaulted him from Day One. He spent most of his early years locked in a closet—yes, even as an infant. Once, as he tried to crawl out of the closet, she slammed the door on his leg, and maimed him for life. Many nights, she lashed him to the foot of her bed—she just didn't want to take the time to get up and take care of him. She beat him about the head over and over again. By seven or eight years old, Jack began to lose his sight. By nine years old, he wasn't able to see enough to go to a normal school. His mother sent him off to school one day, then packed his bags. He went to school thinking it would just be another day. But it wasn't. People from a school for the blind picked up Jack that afternoon after school. He never went home again. Jack did the rest of his growing up by himself at that school.

As you hear Jack's story, you realize right away, yes, his eyes were broken; and yes, his leg had been broken; yes, he is physically disabled. But there was something else, something much deeper. Jack was a broken man. In a combination of deep discouragement, confusion, and rage, Jack essentially said of life, "This just doesn't make any sense. What is going on here?"

There is a Latin word that says it all. *Anomie*. This word captures those moments in life where you feel detached from meaning, detached from purpose, detached from your identity, detached from your values. Literally, if you translate this word, it means this: "There's no name for this." My dad stood in front of that car and screamed into the cosmos, "There's no name for what I'm going through!" Jack looks at his life and says, "There's no name for this!" Parents stand at the bed of their newly lifeless child. "Children aren't supposed to die first!" They watch the life seep out of that body and cry, "*Anomie*! There's no name for this!" A once vibrant person slides down that mud tube of depression and fear without any handholds. "*Anomie*! There's no name for what I'm going through!" A man works all his life on his career and then because of the greed and avarice of his CEO he loses everything—his job, his life savings, his retirement benefits. He screams, "*Anomie*! There's no name for this!" A man lives with the marching progress of progressive disease, knowing that an enemy in his cells is stealing his vitality and he can't do a thing about it. Watching and feeling his body change dramatically, he cries, "*Anomie*! There's no name for what I'm going through!" A wife learns that the man she gave her heart to, the man she planned her future with, the man she dearly loved from her youth, this man has turned his back on her for twenty minutes of sexual satisfaction with someone else. She weeps, "*Anomie*! There's no name for what I'm going through! *Anomie*! *Anomie*! *Anomie*!" That's life in a fallen and falling down world. We all live in Job's house. I might wish to live down the block in another housing development! But somehow, I must live in Job's house, too. We all live in Job's house.

Anomie *in Our Fallen World*

Paul describes Job's house in Romans 8:20-22. Three remarkable phrases describe this world in which we live, a world of brutally personal *anomie*. First, he says that our world is *subjected to frustration*. What a phrase! Nothing in this world works the way it's supposed to. It is, in fact, a tragically broken cosmos. Brokenness is everywhere. Why would a young tough steal the purse of an old lady? Why do silent toxins rob the vitality of an entire community of innocent citizens? Why do politicians do evil things? Why can't siblings get along? This world is a broken place. The Fall has frustrated the cosmos.

Then Paul says that the world is *in bondage to decay*. What a scary phrase! A world in bondage to decay. Every thing that exists is in

the process of dying. Whatever power, beauty, or goodness we now see, things are still not liberated from the shackles of destruction and death.

Finally Paul says, "The world is groaning as in the pains childbirth." There are moments of mind-numbing, focus-getting, acute pain in childbirth. You don't walk around doing your housecleaning or sipping coffee saying, "I'm only having a baby. I'm just going to live around this birth." No, it grabs your attention. It forces you to focus. It engages your whole body. There are moments in the fallen world of dramatically acute pain, pain that grabs the mind, grabs the body, grabs the soul. You just can't live around this pain. It gets you. It focuses you. It's like childbirth. It grabs you and leads you around. It controls you.

I run from room to room in Job's house, and I can't find one I like. I've been upstairs, downstairs, and in the basement. I tried the garage. Job's house is just Job's house. It's not only that we all live in Job's house, we also live next to people who are in Job's house. We counsel people who live in Job's house. That makes us uncomfortable, too.

The church of Jesus Christ often has a rather uncomfortable relationship with suffering. We're not sure what to do with it. And we do a lot of uncomfortable things. We greet people with theological platitudes, often lobbing mortars of truth from afar. We make promises to people that we shouldn't make and can't keep. We even make promises for God. Sometimes we are so uncomfortable around people who are suffering that we cut a wide path to avoid them. How many people have said to me, as they've gone through suffering, "It was bad enough to lose my husband (wife, child, health...) but I lost my friends, too. They felt so uncomfortable around me. They just didn't know what to do and what to say."

Sometimes, even in prayer, that discomfort comes to the fore. We're good at praying that God would heal a person's body—and that's not a bad thing to pray for. We're good at praying for God to change bad situations—and that's good. But often our prayers actually miss that person in the middle of suffering. We forget that suffering is always a vat of temptation. A chorus of *anomie, anomie, anomie* is all around us, the sad song of humanity. The person in the middle needs more than a situation fix. It was a great thing that Job's health, wealth, family, and social status were eventually restored. But it was a greater thing that Job was restored while still in the midst of suffering.

First Corinthians gives a stunning answer. The church in Corinth should be called, "The First Church of Job's House." It's not the kind of church you want to attend. It was riddled with division, broken by immorality, ravaged by messed up marriages, and totally confused in its relationship to the surrounding culture. Worship services were chaotic. First Corinthians reaches crescendo in chapter 15. Paul turns from difficulty to talk about the only thing that speaks with lasting power in order to reverse *anomie.* He begins to talk about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that Jesus is alive, not because he's interested in looking at the past. He talks about it because he's intently interested in talking about the future.

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In the middle of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul makes a foundational statement: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Life cannot just be about *this.* If all you have is *this*, you can't make any sense out of anything. If all you do is try to rearrange *this*, you are a pitiable person. If Jesus is just for fixing *this*, our faith is pitiful. Ministry and theology are not about rearranging the chairs in Job's house. Everything in Job's house screams for *more than this*. If there is not more, there is no hope. We need to learn that when we begin to bring eternity into now, we are not changing the subject. We are addressing the subject in the only way it can be addressed.

How can I say to Jack, my blind and

battered friend, "Let's just pick apart your life and understand it a little more." How cruel would that be? There has to be more. Paul says that if you understand the resurrection, you have broken the code. You find that there is more.

Do you read novels? I like to read novels because I love the craft of writing. But writing is not something I naturally do. I speak. But there are people who understand the writing process. They get you right into the middle of the complex plot. You become the character in the drama. You live with those other characters. You join the conversation. You enter the struggles. You wish that you could jump to the end of the book, that the novelist would tell you the secret early in the story. When you finally do get to the ending, you think back over everything you've read. The pieces fall into place. One of the sweet functions of the Word of God is that God lets us in on the secret early in the story. He allows us to eavesdrop on eternity, to listen in, to look in, to stand in with saints on the other side, and then to look back at the drama in which we now struggle. Read the following words slowly, sentence by sentence. Envision, and listen.

> After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."
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> All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen."
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> Then one of the elders asked me, "How did these people get here?" Who are these people in white robes? Who are they, and where did they come from?"
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> I answered, "Sir, you know."
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> And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:9-17)

Eavesdrop on Eternity

A countless multitude has passed through great sufferings, through the tears of anomie. Now they cry out with joy. What do they celebrate? These people are not saying, "I stayed handsome till the day I died." "I had the greatest house—you wouldn't have believed my house! Why our family room had a family room!" "I had three Plymouth Belvederes!" "I had phenomenal career! I was one of those fast trackers. I retired at forty!" "We had the coolest vacations! We saw the world." "You wouldn't have believed my wardrobe! You think clothes? I had clothes." "My kids—I had trophy kids! We should have bronzed them and put them on the mantle!" "Food? We ate food gourmet meals every day." "People liked me. It was great. I was a popular guy. I was so cool. Everywhere I went I was a people-magnet!"

No.

None of that. Here's what they say: "*You* did it! *You* did it! *You* did it! Salvation belongs to our God." What does that mean? The celebration of the awesome saving grace of God is not a celebration of a theology of salvation. It's a celebration of the Person who saves. They're saying, "Salvation belongs to God." They recognize, "In all of those moments of *anomie*, You were with us. You were with us in all the places where we couldn't *hear* You, in all the places where we couldn't *see* You, in all the places where we couldn't *find* You. You were there. If we're on this side now, You had to be with us every moment then, because You save. We finally see You!" As people look back on their lives—suffering, sin, hunger, thirst, heat, tears—now every room of Job's house is filled

with the glory of the Lamb. The house looks different now.

They also recognize something else: "You kept us in Job's house because You wanted to display Your personal glory through the broken lives of human beings. You kept us in Job's house because You wanted that salvation to be displayed, and then declared. The world is about *anomie*, and the Lamb is what the world needs. You, Savior, called us to live in Job's house so those who couldn't see the Savior might glimpse His glory in the very rooms where they didn't want to be."

It's a great scene. The saints celebrate. The angels can't keep quiet. A cascade of celebration: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. It was You! It was You! It was You! You were with us all along. We were never alone. We were never by ourselves. Every moment was guarded and guided by You. If we are *now* on this side, it's only because in every moment *then* You were in us, near us, with us. You, O Savior, are Emmanuel."

Every cry of *anomie* is a deep personal cry for meaning. Meaning isn't found in abstractions or achievements or experiences. Meaning is found in a Person. And the deep personal cry of meaning is worship. And there's one thing more in this scene. God's people course their way to eternity still weeping, because they're still living in Job's house. They carry the scars, pain, and loss with them. They cry their way into eternity. As a final act of redemption, God rises from His throne, walks among His people, puts His hands up to their eyes, and says, "Don't cry anymore. It's over. It's over. It really is over." Every cry of those who live in Job's house is a cry for release and resolution. On the other side, there will not be any more reason to cry.

Go back to your place to live in Job's house. Live with people who live in Job's house. If we are going to offer meaning and resolution, then we must become a community of eternity. We need to eavesdrop on eternity. We need to see the presence of the risen Lord Jesus who will never ever leave us or forsake us. "I will be with you always." In the tough moments, He delivers us from our deepest difficulty. We need to present the bright hope to people. There will be a life much longer, much fuller, much more glorious life. *Anomie* will be no more.

Eavesdrop on eternity. Suffering must be seen in light of eternity. *This*, right here and now, cannot be all there is. By the grandeur of His grace, Jesus has let us in on a secret. We have gotten the ending while we're still in the middle of the story so that we see, and hear, and hope, and rest. Praise Him!

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