

An Angry Man:
 Living on the High Wire
 Job 34

The Center of Science and Industry (COSI) in Columbus, OH is home to a myriad of exciting science exhibits. If you're visiting the Columbus area this is a great place to take your entire family. Stop by one of the classic exhibits, the High Wire Unicycle.

Don't be frightened to ride the Unicycle. You'll travel across an 84-foot cable while 17 feet above the ground. Worried about falling off? Don't be. A 250-pound counterweight drops the cycle's center of mass to well below your feet. The counterweight always keeps you safely upright. Yes, I rode the Unicycle and learned lessons about tension in our lives.

The tension on the cable appears to be greatest at both ends. Peddling the cycle in the center is extremely easy. Peddling the unicycle at both ends requires you to peddle uphill, going forward and backward.

Imagine the cable as your belief system. You live on the wire with your beliefs, placing opposite ideas at opposite ends from one another. For example:

Truth vs. Deception	Grace vs. Justice
Mercy vs. Punishment	Light vs. Darkness
Hope vs. Despair	Peace vs. Conflict
Comfort vs. Turmoil	Faith vs. Works

As we live on the high wire, we place some elements of our belief system at the extreme ends of the wire. We live out other elements of our belief system closer to the center of the wire. Conflict arises between people when we expect them to live their belief system along the wire exactly as we have laid out the positions of our belief system. No two people have congruent belief systems. Thus, the conflict arises. Sometimes, we experience inner conflict when we rearrange the elements of our belief system on the wire. Life on the high wire requires balance.

Job's belief system may have looked something like this. Up to the time of his testing (Job 1-2), Job lived under the theory of Divine Retribution

Divine Retribution	Man without God
God rules His universe.	Man has self-autonomy.
God expects obedience.	Man exercises self-autonomy.
God punishes disobedience.	Man hopes for grace and mercy.
God blesses obedience.	Man gets the good life by his own initiative.
Suffering results from disobedience.	Suffering is a part of life.
Bad things happen to bad people.	Bad things happen to everyone.

Divine retribution was a part of Job's life. While Job lived in comfort, nothing

As iron sharpens iron,
 So a person sharpens his friends.
 -- Solomon

occurred to challenge his belief system. With the loss of his family, possessions and health, he became utterly confused. Having lived righteously before God and in the presence of his community, he suffered physically, emotionally and spiritually. Someone tweaked his high wire and made the belief system elements shift places. Something was not right.

Elihu Presents His Case

After listening to Job's three friends try to bring Job to repentance, the young Elihu speaks out. Starting his second speech in Job 34, Elihu opens his arguments, striving to bring a united front against Job. Like a used car salesman nodding his head "yes," Elihu attempts to bring his audience to common ground (34:4). "Let us choose what is right; let us know among ourselves what is good."

Then, like a seasoned prosecutor, Elihu lays out the charges against Job (34:5-9). Job said, "I am in the right, and God has taken away my right; in spite of my right I am counted a liar; my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression" (34:5-6; cf. 27:2-6; 9:15; 10:15; 33:9). He accuses Job of drinking up scoffing like water (34:7). Moreover, He "travels in company with evil doers and walks with wicked men" (34:8). Guilt by association. Paul said it another way. "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Furthermore, Job said, "It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God" (34:9; cf. 9:22-23, 29-31; 21:7, 15; 24:1). Blasphemy.

Turning from directly prosecuting Job, Elihu now defends God (34:10-15). It is impossible for God to do wrong because wickedness is not a part of His nature (34:10). If God is righteous, then God repays us according to our ways (34:11). With deftness, Elihu introduces the theory of divine retribution. Rephrasing 34:10, Elihu says of God, "God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice" (34:12). How do we know this to be God's character? God, the Creator of the universe, is also the righteous Judge of all that live in the universe (34:13-15). God is right; Job is wrong.

Casting God as righteous and mighty (34:17), Elihu continues to build his case against Job. God does not hate justice (34:16-20). He shows no partiality (34:18-19). God is in control of our destiny (34:20). How could Job say that God has taken away His rights? Under the theory of divine retribution, Job receives his just deserves because he acted wickedly in the presence of the righteous God.

But you might ask, how can God be so objective in His judgment against Job? God sees all things (34:21-30). He is omniscient. No one can hide from His view. Evil doers cannot hide from His watchful eyes (34:22). Later, the Psalmist would write,

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
 Or where shall I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
 If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
 and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me.

As iron sharpens iron,
 So a person sharpens his friends.
 -- Solomon

¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,”
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you. ([Psalm 139:7–12](#) ESV)

Because of God’s omniscience and omnipresence, there is no need for men to stand in judgment before Him ([34:23](#)). God simply punishes the wicked ([34:24-26](#)). He punishes them “because they turned from following Him and had no regard for any of His ways” (34:27). Finally, with the skill of a seasoned blacksmith, Elihu brings the hammer of righteousness down on the anvil of justice when he implies that Job “caused the cry of the poor to come to Him (God) and he (God) heard the cry of the afflicted” (34:28). This rich uncaring agriculturalist turned his back on the poor and is now receiving his just penalty. Who is in the wrong? God or Job?

Bringing his second speech to an end, Elihu accuses Job of having a non-repentant heart ([34:31-33](#)). Like the wicked, Job speaks without knowledge or insight ([34:35-36](#)). Instead of justifying himself before God, Job adds rebellion to the already long list of charges against him ([34:37](#)) because he associates with wicked men ([34:36](#)).

Did Elihu Make His Case?

Let’s give Elihu credit for being correct on at least four points. Elihu accurately reported Job’s words. He is also correct about God’s righteous nature. God is the Creator and Judge of the universe punishing the wicked. Being the Creator and Judge, God is also omniscient and omnipresent. Elihu is also correct in that Job had a non-repentant heart.

However, Job stood blameless before God (Job [1:1](#), [8](#); [2:3](#)). Therefore, repentance for the reported crimes by Elihu was out of the question for Job. Yes, because all people sin and fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23), Job did have sin in his life, but not to the magnitude suggested by Elihu and the three friends. As to the other charges Elihu brought against Job, Job was innocent. Elihu wrongly assumes that Job has kept company with evil people. He also assumes, without evidence, that Job has oppressed the poor.

As iron sharpens iron,
So a person sharpens his friends.
-- Solomon