

REFERENCE POINT

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Growing Pains

“And though you started with little, you will end with much.” (Job 8:7 NLT)

Each fall semester I teach a section of Palm Beach Atlantic University’s First Year Experience course. This course is designed to assist first year students as they acclimate to college life and help them develop the skills they need in order to succeed, both in college and beyond. I start each class session off with a devotion. The verse that I share on the very first day of class is Job 8:7. Although the Book of Job may be an unusual choice to begin the year with, I like starting with this verse because it is a good reminder that we are all growing, and that there may be some suffering along the way. Things may seem overwhelming at times, especially when you are new, whether you’re a new student or a new employee. But in the end, when you look back over your time at a particular institution or a specific phase of your life, you can see how much you learned and grew.

I have a paperweight on my desk that my mom bought for me when I got my first full-time job in a library. It has a quote from the theologian Søren Kierkegaard, “life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward.” It can be easy with hindsight to look back on an event or a conversation and identify how you would have done it differently, if you had only known. But that’s the beauty of those experiences. Mistakes and suffering help us learn and grow in ways that we can’t always see or comprehend.

We are reminded of this truth in Romans 5:3-4, “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.” In this section of Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul is telling the early Christians that we have peace with God through Jesus because of our faith. Jesus’s suffering on the cross led to our salvation. Yes, life will be difficult and challenging at times, but there is hope for a future glory that we can share with our Redeemer. Even in the midst of his suffering, Job calls out “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the Earth” (19:25).

In the end, Job is rewarded for his faithfulness. His fortunes are restored to him, greater than they were before; he is blessed again with a family and friends with whom he can share his life. Job’s story is not one of endless suffering, but rather a reminder that faith will see us through times of trouble as well as times of joy. As we begin this new school year, look at situations that take you out of your comfort zone; see how you can learn from them. And then next year, take a moment to look back and appreciate how much you have grown.



—Elizabeth Fairall
Elizabeth is the Digital Services Librarian at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, FL. She has been an ACL member since 2014.