

Job

Knowing God in Pain



Lesson 2 ————— Job 1:13-3:26

Job & Two Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Days

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord....

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

—Job 1:21b-22

The phone rang in the middle of the night. My husband mumbled a blurry *hello*. In seconds he was sitting straight up in bed, listening intently, running his fingers anxiously through his hair—the way he only does when something is very wrong. I remember him moaning three words, "Oh no. How?" I slid next to him, my stomach tightening into a sick knot, every nerve tingling on edge. Tom hung up the phone and wrapped his big arms around me. "Bob was killed tonight in a plane crash." *Bob? My big brother? But he was just months from leaving for his first term as a missionary pilot. He had a wife, a two-year-old little girl, a nine-month-old baby boy who would never even remember him. How could this be happening?*

Chances are you've lived through your own dark moments like this. If not, you most certainly will. Everything is going along fine—then tragedy hits. The death of a loved one. A life-changing injury. The sudden loss of a job. A troubling result on a medical test. The collapse of a marriage. A child who turns away from the Lord.

How we respond in these heart-wrenching circumstances is so important—not just here on earth among family and friends who are watching and listening, but in heaven itself where the very thoughts of our hearts are revealed. Even when we don't understand, these moments are never "meaningless." They are part of God's plan. And no matter how great the suffering, it will never be more than we can handle through His strength.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

—2 Corinthians 4:7-9

The *treasure* these verses speak of is the gospel—the foundation of our personal, intimate knowledge of God. What Job knew about God enabled him to respond in faith in the face of excruciating affliction, to bring glory to the Creator, and gain a victory over Satan before the host of heaven. Now that gives pain a whole new perspective.

DAY 1

- 1) Read Job 1:13-22.
- 2) Four messengers came to Job one right after another. Record the news each brings.

Messenger #1 (vs. 14-15)

Messenger #2 (vs. 16)

Messenger #3 (vs. 17)

Messenger #4 (vs. 18-19)

- 3) What does Job do? (vs. 20)
- 4) What does Job say? Read verse 21 and put it into your own words.
- 5) How does the Bible summarize Job's response to all these tragedies?
- 6) To *blame* (Hebrew *tiplah*) God means to accuse Him of doing something wrong, worthless, or meaningless. Is there a hurt or hardship that you are blaming God for in your life? Our desire is for you to gain a new perspective on your heartaches so you can fully experience God's comfort and healing. Read Psalm 51:10-12 and make it your prayer throughout this study. Consider sharing your struggle with your small group.

Selah

Job clearly had set God in His rightful place—before everything else in his life—long before those messengers arrived on that fateful day. Because his heart and mind were right with God before tragedy hit, he was able to respond with astonishing faith and righteousness. The Psalmist reflects that right heart attitude.

*Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my*

portion forever.... But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works. –Psalm 73:25,26,28

Are these verses true of your heart? Is God first over all in your life, your only real desire? Meditate on Job's example and on these verses for a day. Ask God to search your heart and reveal areas you need to yield to His control.

DAY 2

- 1) Read Job 2:1-10.
- 2) Once again God draws Satan's attention to Job. What has God added to his commendation of Job in verse 3 (compare to 1:8).
- 3) What is Satan's complaint and challenge this time? (vs. 4-5)
- 4) What permission and restriction does God give Satan? (vs. 6)
- 5) Describe how Satan afflicts Job (vs. 7-8)
- 6) How does Job's wife respond to his affliction? (vs. 9) Compare her comments to God's commendation of Job in verse 3.
- 7) What do you think the phrase "hold fast your integrity" means?
- 8) How does Job respond to his wife and to this affliction?

Selah

"In all this Job did not sin with his lips." Most of us find that hard to achieve on a good day. Read James 3:5-12. Do the words of your mouth reflect a soul filled with sweetness or bitterness? Think of all the different ways you can sin with your lips. Which of these presents the greatest temptation for you personally? Commit the words of your mouth to the Lord today and be on alert for Satan's attacks.

DAY 3

- 1) Read Job 2:11-13.
- 2) The Bible gives us clues to the ancestry of two of Job's friends. Read the following verses and record what you find.

Eliphaz the Temanite—Genesis 36:10-11

Bildad the Shuhite—Genesis 25:1-2

- 3) Why did Job's three friends come to see him? (vs 11)
- 4) In verses 12 and 13, we are given a detailed description of the reactions of Job's friends when they saw him in such distress. List your observations below.

What Job's Friends Did:

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-
-
-
-

What Job's Friends Didn't Do:

-

- 5) Verse 13 says Job's friends said nothing for seven days. Why?

Why is silence an appropriate response in this situation?

In your experience, how good are people today at offering one another the comfort of their presence without a lot of words?

- 6) Read Romans 8:26. What does this verse add to your understanding of being silent in the face of great suffering?

DAY 4

- 1) Read Job 3. Summarize Job's comments.
- 2) In verse 1 Job opens his mouth with a curse. What does Job curse? What doesn't he curse?
- 3) Compare Job's words in chapter 3 to his initial responses in 1:20-21 and 2:10. How do you see Job's response changing? Why do you think this is happening?
- 4) How would you describe Job's emotional state at this point?

Do you think Job is still a righteous man? Why or why not?

- 5) In 3:24-26 Job gives us some clues to the physical effects of his illness and emotional suffering. Record what you discover in these verses.

 **Selah**

Job, a man singled out for his devotion and righteousness, wrestled with depression and despair. Does that surprise you? How would you respond to Job after hearing his lament? Would you comfort or correct...understand or debate...embrace or avoid? More to the point, how are you responding to those in your life today who are in the depths of suffering? It's not easy to walk alongside one another through those dark valleys. We'll be dealing more with this important issue in the weeks to come.

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

Under Siege (1:13-22)

Satan opens fire on Job with a staggering "shock-and-awe" attack that came in four waves leaving Job in total ruin and devastation.

What Job Lost	Cause
Raid 1: Oxen stolen Donkeys stolen Servants killed	Enemy attack—Sabeans (predatory tribe of north Arabian nomads)
Raid 2: Sheep killed Servants killed	Natural disaster—"fire of God from heaven" (lightning strike)
Raid 3: Camels stolen Servants killed	Enemy attack—Chaldeans (fierce roving marauders who later settled in what is now Iran)
Raid 4: All his children killed	Natural disaster—"a great wind" (tornado)

At this moment it would have been natural for Job to feel under attack not only from evil men but from God Himself. Note how Job's servant describes the lightning strike as "the fire of God" from heaven (1:16). Isn't it curious that when natural disasters strike, we still refer to them as "acts of God"? We know who Job's true adversary really was.

First Response (1:20)

In the face of tragedy, Job responds with an amazing blend of grief and faith.

Tore his robe
&
Shaved his head

Fell to the ground
&
Worshipped

Tearing his outer garment and cutting his hair are expressions of violent grief that were common in the culture of biblical times (Gen. 37:34; Josh. 7:6; Ezra 9:3,5). Such occasions generally included loud weeping and wailing (Ps. 42:3; John 11:33-35). Still today such open and public releases of intense sorrow are common in eastern cultures. We sometimes catch glimpses of these in news footage from the Middle East. Medical professionals assert that this is actually much more natural and beneficial to human needs than the suppression of grief practiced in our modern western world.

Next Job falls in worship—extending his body full-length, face pressed to the ground. It was the most sincere expression of complete and humble submission to His Creator. Job's strong faith does not cancel out his overwhelming grief. They mingle and coexist together.

What comfort and support we miss out on when we hide our sorrow and suffering from one another.

Victory Won (1:21-22)

Remember that poetry in wisdom literature is seen in parallel ideas. We see this in the wisdom quatrain in verse 21-22: Job's first words after receiving the devastating news.

Naked I came	⇒	Naked I shall return
The Lord gave	⇒	The Lord has taken away

Job's initial words reveal his true heart at the onset of his affliction—one of supreme faith and total resignation to the sovereign will of God. Job has no understanding of the battle going on in heaven. The knowledge Job did have was that everything he had was from God. This was the source of his strength. In Job's mind, if God was the source of everything he had *including his children*, then it followed that God could rightfully take those things away.

Job concludes, *Blessed be the name of the LORD*. Imagine the heavenly host erupting in cheers at these words! Satan's goal was to make Job curse God. Instead, all the suffering he rained down on Job only gave him an occasion to bless the Lord once again. What a victory!

Round Two (2:1-8)

We have no knowledge of how much time has passed when Satan again comes at the appointed time to present himself before the Lord. Once again God triumphantly points to his faithful servant Job who has become even stronger as a result of the testing. "He still holds fast his integrity" (vs. 3). The Hebrew word for *holds fast* (Hebrew *chazaq*) indicates a strengthening or firmly rooting of what he already had.

What Job had was *integrity* (Hebrew *tummah*). The precise meaning of this word when used as a character trait has gotten hazy in our modern culture. It may be easier to understand if we consider the meaning of the word when applied to objects. A wilderness region has integrity when it has not been corrupted by development, when it remains unspoiled. A computerized database maintains its integrity as long as it remains uncorrupted by error; a defense system as long as it is not breached. The word denotes wholeness, completeness, impregnability, and purity.

This is what God meant when He described Job. It is the quality of relationship He desires with each of us today as believers.

Lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and...be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.... And do not give the devil an opportunity. —Ephesians 4:22b-24, 27

Satan's Second Attack (2:4)

You can sense Satan's frustration seething in his outburst: "Skin for Skin!" (vs. 4). Satan argues that he hasn't been allowed to make Job suffer enough. Taking all he holds most dear in the world, including his children, is one thing. Satan contends that if Job suffers physically he will hit the breaking point and curse God. Certain of his integrity, God entrusts Job with the fearsome honor of glorifying Him in affliction yet again. Satan is limited in only one regard; he may not take Job's life. That power belongs to God alone.

Satan's attack is simple and all encompassing. He covers Job with "sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (vs. 7). Medical doctors have long speculated about the exact nature of Job's illnesses, including smallpox, elephantiasis, chronic eczema, leprosy, or an aggressive form of skin cancer. The bottom line is we don't know the exact diagnosis, but we know a lot about the symptoms.

- Inflamed, ulcerous sores over entire body 2:7
- Persistent itching 2:8
- Degenerative changes in facial skin, disfiguration 2:12
- Loss of appetite 3:24
- Fears and depression 3:25
- Inability to sleep 7:4
- Purulent sores that burst, scab over, crack and ooze with pus 7:5
- Worms that form in the sores themselves 7:5
- Difficulty in breathing 9:18
- A darkening of the eyelid 16:16
- Foul breath 19:17
- Loss of weight 19:20; 33:21
- Excruciating, continual pain 30:27
- High fever with chills and discoloring of skin 30:30

—Source: *Job* by Charles R. Swindoll

Job is described as sitting among the ashes, scraping his oozing, feverish skin with a broken piece of pottery. Why wasn't Job home in a comfortable bed with servants to attend him and ease his suffering? To prevent the spread of infectious disease in biblical times, people with ailments, particularly of the skin, would leave the confines of a home or city until the illness passed. Some suggest Job was sitting in the city dump where refuse was burned. Others suggest that sitting in ashes was yet another expression of grief common in his day. Either way the ashes were perhaps the most sterile place a man with sores could sit; and the ancients may well have been aware of their physical benefits.

Job's Integrity Holds (2:9-10)

Job's wife makes her first and only appearance. Before we judge her to harshly keep in mind, she too has suddenly, horribly become childless. She too has lost all her possessions, her comforts and security. And now she has lost the companionship of her

husband. No longer is Job there to help put the pieces of their shattered lives back together, to share memories of the children over a cup of coffee, to hold her through the long nights of grief. Not knowing the limitation God has put on the Adversary, she looks at her husband and believes in her heart that his disease is incurable. She can't bear to see him suffer any more. "Curse God and die!" You can imagine Satan at this moment trembling in anticipation, whispering in Job's ear with a chilling smile, *Yes, curse God!*

Job's response shows compassion and understanding for his wife and complete acceptance of God's will for his life (vs. 10). Instead of railing a charge of blasphemy at his wife, he sees her statement as one of desperation. When he warns that she is talking like a foolish woman, this is a spiritual observation not an intellectual one. Job uses the same word we see in Psalm 53:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Instead of denying his God, Job reasserts his allegiance to the Sovereign Lord regardless of circumstances. Despite all that has happened to this point, Job has not erred with his lips.

Three Friends (2:11-13)

It may have taken several months for the news of Job's hard times to reach his three friends, and for them in turn to make arrangements and travel together to comfort Job. We know only a little about these three men.

- **Eliphaz** was from Teman, a city known for its wisdom. According to Genesis 36:4, Esau's firstborn was a man named Eliphaz who had a son named Teman.
- **Bildad** was a Shuite, descendants of Abraham through Keturah—his wife after the death of Sarah (Genesis 25:2).
- **Zophar** was from Naamah which may have been in northern Arabia.

From the context we understand that these were probably wealthy sheiks who had the time and financial means to leave their homes and businesses in order to visit Job. Each one came for two reasons: to sympathize and to comfort. Sympathy includes identifying with the sufferer, entering into their world and allowing oneself to be touched with their pain, to feel their anguish. It's *weeping with those who weep* (Romans 12:15). Comfort is attempting to ease the pain and make the sorrow lighter. It's providing a meal, taking care of the kids, bringing the latest copy of a favorite magazine, or running errands. You help wherever help is needed because you want to lighten their load if only for a moment.

We will be saying a lot of unkind things about these three friends very soon, but let's not miss what they do at the beginning when they get it right—very right.

- 1) **They came when there was a need.** They didn't wait to be asked, *Would you please come sit with me in the ashes and cheer me up?* They came even though it meant serious inconvenience in their own lives. They each stopped their own pursuits and put their friend's needs first.
- 2) **They demonstrated sympathy and compassion.** Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar truly entered into Job's world and were touched by his pain. They wailed and wept, tore their robes of nobility, and threw ashes over their heads.

- 3) **They say nothing.** For seven days and seven nights the three friends say nothing, and it is the best help they give during their entire stay with Job. Perhaps the only help. Warren Wiersbe writes: "The best way to help people who are hurting is just to be with them saying little or nothing and letting them know you care. Don't try to explain everything; explanations never heal a broken heart."

Job's Opening Lament (chp 3)

When we get to chapter 3 Job can no longer suffer in silence but spews out all the anguish and despair of a broken man. (Now this is a response I can relate to!) The shift from what we heard Job say in the first two chapters to what we read now and through most of the rest of the book is sobering. This remarkable man of deep and abiding faith has sunken into the depths of despondency and spiritual depression. This shouldn't surprise us. Ask anyone who has suffered a tragic death or endured months of chronic pain and they will tell you: the first is never the worst. The very depths of agony take time to reach. Job's initial responses were genuine, but now the affliction has been intensified by time.

There is a grim line of reasoning in this opening lament:

- Job curses the day of his birth. (3:1-10)
- Job laments that he didn't die at birth. (3:11-19)
- Job sees death as preferable to life. (3:20-26)

In verse 23 Job perceives that the very God who had put a hedge of protection and blessing about him has now hemmed him in with trouble and distress. He can't eat, can't stop crying, can't sleep, *but turmoil comes* (vs 24-26).

While black with pessimism it is important to note: Job has lost his love for life, *not* his love for God. Though pushed to the very brink, he has not lost his faith. Because righteousness is by faith (Rom. 10:10), Job remains a righteous man even in this state of despair. By cursing the day of his birth, he questions the sovereign wisdom of his Creator. This is dangerous spiritual territory, but Job never crosses the line and curses God. There is never a victory celebration for Satan.

The Expositors Bible Commentary summarizes this chapter well:

What does this chapter teach us? What is its function as part of Scripture?... What we can see in the chapter is how even a man of great faith can fall into the slough of despond. That one as great as Job should have such a struggle of faith is a source of support to those similarly afflicted, especially when viewed in the light of the rest of the Book of Job. God prefers we speak with him honestly, even in our moments of deepest gloom, than that we mouth innocuous clichés far removed from reality.