

Faith Tested
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Allen Power

Job 1:8-22

Opening: *"Oh, Lord, not the book of Job!"* Those are the words I spoke to myself and to Him early one morning when I realized the book of Job was next in our study plan. *"Lord, after the year we've all had can we deal with Job?"* It's a book about suffering. Worse yet it is a book about undeserved suffering. It's a long book and can be hard to read as it zigzags between prose, poetry, monologue and dialogue. I contemplated substituting a study in Philippians. Let's recover from COVID-19 with the book of the Bible all about joy. The problem was that would fly in the face of how we've studied the Bible all these years in this group.

The whole premise of the Lifeway "Explore the Bible" concept is summed up in their slogan: *"The whole truth, book by book."* The plan rotates back and forth from Old Testament to New Testament. We don't pick scripture like items from a salad bar; we systematically do a survey of every book in scripture. Obviously, I opted to stick with the plan because I just gave you the text.

I'm still toiling with this challenge: How can we study this book for the next several weeks and be encouraged rather than depressed? If you try to read Job and stop after the first three chapters you WILL be depressed! That's why we need to get the whole picture on WHY God inspired an unknown writer (maybe Job himself) to pen this book. We won't cover every word of every chapter in seven Sundays, but we WILL walk away with several important realities we need to understand. We will be introduced to them in just this first chapter. Steven Lawson summarized them as, Sovereignty, Satan, Suffering, and Submission.

The truth that should change us: God is sovereign, suffering is real, and He uses suffering in ways we may not understand for our good and His glory. Our response to Him in the midst of suffering will reveal the strength of our faith.

- Verses one through five introduce us to Job, a man blameless and upright.
- Not sinless, no one is, but he feared God and shunned evil consistently.
- He was also incredibly blessed and fabulously rich. Verse three says he was the greatest of all the people of the east. Righteous, rich, and famous!
- Suddenly we are in front of the throne of God. The angels are giving God reports of their work on earth and suddenly the most unlikely “being” waltzed right into God’s presence: the “accuser” Satan. What?
- God asked Satan what he had been up to (although God knew.)
- *“Roaming the earth causing havoc and trying to destroy your people!”*
- Then God says and does something shocking. Look at verse eight.

Job 1:8–12 (ESV) — 8 And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” **9** Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? **10** Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. **11** But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” **12** And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

- Our first dilemma in this mysterious book: Why would God dangle blameless and upright Job in front of Satan like a mouse over a cat?
- Fact: God initiated what was about to happen to poor Job.
- Satan’s hateful response: *“Job only fears you because you’ve protected him (a “hedge” of protection) and coddled him like a spoiled child. Take away his fabulous life and he will “curse you to your face!”*

- Question: On the surface we would assume a very wealthy person would have no problem attracting friends or romantic relationships. If you could read the mind of that rich person, what is the real question they have about every friend or potential romance?
- Satan has uncovered a challenging question for every follower of Christ: Do I love and fear God because of how He has blessed me, or do I love and fear Him just for Him? If He took it all away would I still love Him?
- The Lord's next words are chilling: "...*all that he has is in your hand.*" Satan, you can destroy it all but you can't touch Job physically (yet.)
- What does this fascinating exchange teach us about God? This characteristic of God is our first "s" word. What is it?
- Satan can't do anything to Job or anyone that God doesn't allow.
- What's troubling is that God not only allowed what would happen to Job, He initiated it for a purpose that is hard for the human mind to comprehend. What is our natural human reaction to that?
- One of the main questions of this book: Why does God allow undeserved suffering in the lives of His people? We may not have a full understanding of WHY but shortly we'll see HOW God's people should respond.
- Satan left to ruin Job's life. Let's make sure we really understand Satan.
- The Hebrew word "satan" means adversary, i.e., one who opposes another, either as a verbal antagonist and so a slanderer or accuser, or one giving physical opposition.¹ Put "the" in front of it (as in Job 1) and he is "the accuser" or "the adversary." Not his name but his mission!
- This passage reminds us that Satan is not to be ignored, minimized, or underestimated. He truly is like a "roaring lion" seeking to devour people.
- Satan's greatest goal would be for people to think he is no big deal.
- Satan is real, but God is Sovereign over everything including him.

- This brings us to our next “s” word: Suffering. Verses 13-19 document the breathtaking and sudden chain of events that rob Job of every earthly person and thing he held dear.
- The Sabeans killed the servants and stole the 500 oxen and 500 donkeys.
- Fire fell from heaven and burned up all 7,000 sheep and more servants.
- Chaldean raiders took all 3,000 camels.
- *“Well, we lost the livestock and the business but I still have my family.”*
- Not so fast, Job! A tornado hit your oldest son’s house killing all 10 kids.
- Devastating, tragic, beyond comprehension, they all apply to Job’s loss.
- *“How could this be? Why would this happen to me? Where is God?”*
- Job’s first human reaction was to collapse into deep mourning:
20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground...(if we stop there it is what we’d expect in this situation.)
- The next two words are surprising: “...and worshiped.”
- In the face of unimaginable tragedy Job worshiped God.

21 And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

- I wonder how many times that last sentence has been quoted at funerals?
- Praising God when He’s giving and blessing is easy, but how do you also “bless” His name when He takes it all away?
- It seems that Job’s reaction to worship God was “hard-wired” into his soul.
- Illustration: My mother in the nursing home: “We have a lot to be thankful for.” Was it the dementia talking or words from decades of trusting God?

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- God is sovereign, suffering is real, and He uses suffering in ways we may not understand for our good and His glory. Our response to Him in the midst of suffering will reveal the strength of our faith.
- First, let me encourage you lest we walk away in a funk today.
- There is a happy ending to Job's story and we'll get to it.
- Chapter 42 reveals, "...*the Lord restored his fortunes. In fact, the Lord gave him twice as much as before!*"^{ii 12} *So the Lord blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. For now he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys.*¹³ *He also gave Job seven more sons and three more daughters.*^{iii 16} *Job lived 140 years after that, living to see four generations of his children and grandchildren.*¹⁷ *Then he died, an old man who had lived a long, full life.*^{iv}
- We have more learning to do in this study but I wanted you to see the light at the end of Job's "tunnel" of suffering.
- How do we apply Job's example in our own suffering or in helping others?
- We might ask, "*If I study the book of Job will it help me better understand why God allows undeserved suffering, even the suffering of His children?*"
- We also might ask, "*If I study the book of Job will it equip me to help others understand why they are going through awful suffering?*"
- It's natural to try to figure out WHY God has allowed suffering into your life or the life of another; especially seemingly undeserved suffering.
- It's natural to try to make sense of it all.
- By the way, Job may have been blameless but he was also human.
- Before this book is done, Job would do his own share of questioning and defending himself to God. God would give him some rope to question and complain...but not too much.
- *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: "The Book of Job...teaches that to ask why, as Job did (3:11–12, 16, 20), is not wrong. But to demand that God answer why, as Job also did (13:22; 19:7; 31:35), is wrong. To insist that God explain*

one's adversities is inappropriate for it places man above God and challenges God's sovereignty.^v

- Job would repent in chapter 42 saying, *"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted...I have uttered what I did not understand...which I did not know...therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*^{vi}
- *Life experience has taught us that God is God and He is not obligated to explain His sovereign plans to us. Sometimes over time He might pull back the curtain and give us a glimpse of how He used suffering for our good and His glory. Most of the time, we simply must trust Him.*
- This brings us to our last "s" word: Submission.
- The dictionary tells us submission in this context means: *"an act of submitting to the authority or control of another."*^{vii}
- Steve Lawson writes: *"Job's reaction to the rapid-fire tragedies is one of reverent submission as he acknowledges God's divine discretion over all the possessions and persons in his life. This submission is understood by Job in the context of his own life when he says, "Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him" (Job 13:15)."*^{viii}
- This is the only practical "action step" I have to offer from this text.
- As much as we'd like to find the key to understanding why God allows the righteous to suffer and what His purpose is in that suffering, there's only one practical thing we can do: Submit to His sovereignty, have faith in His love for us, and trust His perfect character to do what is BEST for us.
- To put it another way, don't try to make sense of the suffering, instead make an altar to submit to God's sovereignty.
- Don't wrangle with "why?" just worship the One Who KNOWS why.
- Charles Spurgeon put it this way: *"The [worldly person] blesses God while he gives him plenty, but the Christian blesses him when he smites him: he believes him to be too wise to err and too good to be unkind; he trusts him where he cannot trace him, looks up to him in the darkest hour, and believes that all is well."*^{ix}

- When we're in the midst of suffering, we need to simply do what God told us to do in Psalm 46:10 (ESV) "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"
- Don't try to make sense of the suffering, instead make an altar to submit to God's sovereignty.

ⁱ Swanson, J. (1997). [*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*](#) :

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Job 42:10). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Job 42:12–13). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Job 42:16–17). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^v Zuck, R. B. (1985). [*Job*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 714–715). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Job 42:2,3,6). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{vii} Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). [*Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*](#). (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

^{viii} Anders, Max. *Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 10 - Job* (p. 8). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{ix} <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons13.ix.html>