

# LIVING ON THE EDGE OF DESPERATE

## Week Three Notes

### Job: Desperate for Answers

Job 1-42

The book of Job is thought to be the oldest book in the Bible. It is classified as wisdom literature. Unlike other books in the Old Testament is not about a nation. It is about a man. A man named Job whose name will always be synonymous with suffering. God, however, is the central figure in the story of Joy. No matter how silent God seems to be for the majority of the book, God is indeed at the heart of it.

#### I. The Character of God

**Read Job 1:1-5.** Job is introduced to the reader as a blameless and upright man. This does not mean that Job is sinless. He is, however, a man full of integrity, who honors God in everything he does. God has also blessed Job with a large family, seven sons and three daughters. Great wealth has also added to Job. He is a businessman whose wealth is calculated by the number of livestock he owns. And Job has a lot. Each group of livestock is representative of a business. Additionally, Job is the priest for his home. The book was written before the Mosaic law was given or the priestly system was instituted. He made intercession and offered sacrifices for his family, always concerned for their spiritual well-being. Job knew God and honored Him in every way.

**The scene changes quickly in Job 1:6-12.** Angels are presenting themselves before the throne of God. Satan appears with them. It is interesting to note that Satan obviously has access to the throne of God/heaven. He still does—for a season. But Satan is **not a free agent**, doing whatever he chooses. He is always the Accuser and Job 1 is no different. Satan appears before God, accusing God and also accusing Job. God brings up Job's righteousness and Satan scoffs saying Job is only righteous because God plays favorites, always protecting Job and causing everything to prosper. The accusation continues accusing Job of only trusting God because of the blessings of God. Satan challenges God to take away the blessings and watch Job curse God. If Job curses God, permanently turning his back on God, then the redemptive work God has done is powerless.

But God is confident. God is not confident in the man Job. Rather God is confident in the redeeming relational work He has already done in Job. You have heard it said God will never give us more than we can handle. Certainly not Biblical, because God always gives us more than we can handle. God is not confident in us. Rather He is confident in the Christ in us. Job 1:12, God agrees to let Satan take everything away from Job, but Satan cannot touch Job. **Notice! God sets the boundaries and Satan does not argue!** God is completely in control. He is sovereign.

#### 1. God is Sovereign.

The sovereignty of God is an inexhaustible subject that permeates every page of Scripture. God is completely in control. Yet in adversity, we struggle with the concept of His sovereignty. We tend to think God is good but not sovereign. Or God is sovereign but not good. The good news is that we do not have to choose between the goodness of God and His sovereignty. He is both all the time (we will elaborate on this thought more). If, however, we try to get an accurate estimation of God by looking at our circumstances, we will always come up with a diminished and distorted view of God. We must see God first and then our circumstances. Our estimation of God must be built upon truth, not circumstances especially when our circumstances are difficult. Circumstances will change. God does not. He is always completely in control.

Nothing happens without God's approval. Lamentations 3:37-38, "*Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamity and good things come?*"

This is a hard truth, even offensive to some in light of the things they have suffered. If so, perhaps it is because we make God into our own image. We view Him as the best version of us we can imagine. But God is completely other. He is not like us.

*Read these verses as you ponder the sovereignty of God*

*John 19:10-11, Lamentation 3:32 (Look carefully at the first phrase), Romans 11:33,*

*Colossians 1:16-17 (especially the last phrase, in Him ALL things hold together)*

J.I. Packer writes about God's sovereignty, "His constant care and absolute rule over all creation is for His own glory and the good of His people. Jerry Bridges adds, "He never pursues His own glory at the expense of the good of His people". Admittedly, it is hard to see the good in adverse circumstances. **Romans 8:28** says, "*God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.*" This verse is often misunderstood and often misapplied. All things are not good. All things do not work for good for all people. This is a precious promise for God's people, those who are His children. But we do not get to define good...*only God defines what is good.*

The last phrase of the verse must be considered thoroughly, “*called according to HIS PURPOSE.*” So, what is HIS purpose for HIS people? The answer lies in verse 29. “*For those whom He foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...*” This verse continues the truth of verse 28. Don’t fret about the word “predestined”. It simply means predetermined. God predetermined, from the very beginning, that everyone who comes into His family will be conformed to the image of Christ. The big word for that is *sanctification*...that lifelong process by which God does an ongoing transformational work in us, making us like Jesus. (Read Philippians 1:6, the good work Paul writes of is conforming us to the image of Christ. Also read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, He is faithful in verse 24 to bring about the sanctification presented in verse 23)

God is completely in control of everything that comes into our lives. Kay Arthur says, “nothing comes into the life of a believer until it first goes through the loving hands of God.” There may be agents of evil, even Satan, at work, but God is in control, setting the unarguable boundaries. As His children, we make sinful choices or others make sinful choices that affect our lives, but God is still in control. He is always at work in our lives. He is not just fixing things as they happen. He is never caught off guard. He allows, He rules, He is sovereign over everything. He is not capricious in His sovereignty, carelessly wielding His authority with a mean or fickle spirit. In the life of a believer, there are no random acts. Will we ever fully grasp this truth? No. It is too far above us. But we can trust Him. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Job had a degree of knowledge and trust in the Almighty One and he certainly was obedient, but God would take Job even deeper...transforming Job’s faith and trust in ways Job never imagined. Trust is always more difficult than obedience. Obedience operates in the rational thought, clear boundaries and even measurable results. Trust however is completely different. It operates in the realm of the uncertain, the unknow, and often painful circumstances of life. There is a mystery surrounding the sovereignty of God and our response of trust; something we will never completely understand. Yet one day we will know fully, just as we have been fully known (I Corinthians 13:12).

In His sovereignty, God does not lie, He is holy in all things, He does no evil. He is infinitely wise and perfectly love.

## **2. God is Wise.**

Jerry Bridges writes, “A common definition of wisdom is good judgement, the best response to a given situation, the ability to develop the best course of action, discernment.” Psalm 147:5, “*His understanding has no limit,*” God’s wisdom is perfect. He never makes a mistake. He knows what He is doing. He sees both the beginning and end of everything. He never agonizes over any decision. His wisdom is infallible.

Any true wisdom we have comes from God. (James 1:5) Both Job and the psalmist say *the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord* (Job 28:28 and Psalm 111:10). Human wisdom will always try to change or circumvent difficult circumstances, always try to remove unpleasant or hard things, always work to alleviate personal suffering. But God uses hard things to conform us to the image of Christ, always asking us to trust Him.

## **3. God is Love**

God’s sovereignty never works apart from His love. In fact, every quality and characteristic work together ALL the time. One characteristic never diminishes or overshadows another. He does not have to lay down His love to exercise His sovereignty. He does not push aside His mercy to establish justice. He never abandons His holiness to extend grace. He is all God, all the time. Trusting God never requires us to choose between His characteristics...especially His love. God is not the dispenser of love, HE IS LOVE. Review the verses from week one and add others to the list as you read and study (Lamentations 3:32, Psalm 32:10, Isaiah 54:10, Romans 8:38-39)

Dear one, if in the difficulties of life, you lose sight of God’s love, look to Calvary. The gift of His son Jesus Christ is the greatest demonstration of love you will ever encounter. (John 3:16, Romans 8:5, 1 John 4:10, 1 John 3:1). Again, as you study and read Scripture add other verse to the list. In difficult times, it may feel as if God does not love us. Feelings may be valid, but they cannot be our standard for knowing and trusting God. God’s Word is the standard and His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ the greatest demonstration of love toward us. Trust Him even when you do not feel it, or understand it, or even believe it in the crucible of adversity. He is sovereign, He is wise, and His is love.

So how do we respond to the Lord during times of adversity?

### **A. Our Response**

Job 1:13-19 presents a series of calamities that happen in quick succession. The Sabeans steal the oxen and donkeys and also kill the servants. The only surviving servant delivers the message. In one swoop, half of Job’s wealth is gone. Another servant appears telling Job that fire came from heaven and burned up all the sheep and the servants caring for them. Next, the

news arrives that the Chaldeans have stolen all the camels and killed the servants caring for them. Job's wealth is wiped out in a matter of moments. But verse 18-19 are the crushing blow, verses hard to read and certainly hard to comprehend. A great wind came and killed all ten of his children. Job responds in anguish and tears. Job 1:20, "*Job arose, tore his robes, shaved his head, fell on the ground...*" All of these actions were cultural responses to extreme pain and grief.

Job chapter 2 begins with a repeat of the scene of heaven. Only this time Satan's accusations involve touching Job himself. God allows Satan to do whatever he wants to Job, only Job's life must be spared. God set the boundaries and Satan does not argue. Incidentally, we never hear from Satan again in the entire book. In chapter 2, Job is inflicted with a terrible disease. Open, seeping boils break out all over his body. Later the text speaks of worms, bad breath, and the inability to sleep. Job is so grotesquely afflicted; he moves or is moved to the dump where he scrapes his skin with a broken piece of pottery. He is the epitome of anguish. And he cries out with a lament.

### **1. It is okay to cry.**

Job 3 is a lament, grieving or mourning out loud. His lament is not a curse at God. It is not a suicide threat. It is lamenting the day he was born and wishing for death to come quickly. Turning to the book of Psalms, we find a large group of lament psalms. Psalm 42 and 43, Psalm 77 and many others. (read Psalm 77:7-9)

### **2. It is okay to ask questions.**

Look at all the questions the psalmist asks in Psalm 77:7-9. Even Job asks God "why" 16 times in the text. God is not opposed to our questions, but rarely if ever does He give the answers we are searching for. Remember too, neither the psalmist or Job are ranting at God. There is no fist shaking or cursing God. There is honest questioning, and I will insert my opinion here, there is reverence even in the questioning.

### **3. It is imperative to worship.**

**Job 1:20** says, "Job tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground and *worshipped*." Job 1:21-22 tells us Job recognized that every blessing is on loan from God. God gives and for some unknown reason, God has taken it all away. But Job chooses, in his tears and questions, to bless the Lord.

Worship refocuses our attention on the Lord. It guards us from bitterness. Worship keeps us from utter despair, and it reminds us of hope. Psalm 77 contains a lot of tough questions posed by the writer, but in verse 10 there is a shift. The writer realized his grief is causing him to view God differently. He chooses to remember all the Lord has done in past; the mighty deeds of God in history and also in the psalmist own life. As he remembers and worships, his attention is turned to God and a right perspective is gained.

Worship is not the 30 minutes of music before the sermon. Worship is our heart's posture before God... humble, surrendered, trusting...acknowledging who God is in His holiness, sovereignty, and love.

## **B. Our Questions**

Oh goodness! Job 2:11-13 introduces three of Job's friends. They do quite well for the first week, staying silent. But then they begin to talk ...and talk. Chapters 4-37 are monologues and dialogues. Job and his 3 friends are discussing the reason for Job's trials. His friends espouse lots of incorrect theories and Job refutes each one. Eliphaz asserts that the innocent never suffers (Job 4:7). Bildad says all ten of Job's children died because they were sinners, and God only rewards the good. Zophar is convinced that Job is a sinner, hiding some secret unconfessed sin. They sound informed and yet they all have a diminished, distorted view of God. They elevate their own experience and opinions. Job rebukes all of them asserting he has nothing to hide and that he trusts God (Job 13:15)

However, Job says he will argue his case with God. He will ask questions of God. Sixteen times, Job asks God, "why". And God never answers. Is it wrong to ask, "why"? No, but it is wrong to demand an answer. God is never obligated to explain Himself to us. God never explains anything to Job.

God is big enough for our wrestling and our questions. He is patient with our misunderstanding and disappointment. But we must always do what the Psalmist (Psalm 77) does. We must adjust our thinking, remember how God has worked in the past, trust God and worship Him. For us, it is imperative that we store up good theology for the days of adversity that are yet to come. We must hide His word in our hearts, knowing the truth of Scripture now because in days of distress our minds will be hard pressed to learn new things.

Have you ever felt like you were wrestling with God? Wanting answers but none were coming? In the middle of word WRESTLE is the word REST. The rest comes as we trust the heart of God, when we cease striving and know that He is God. Job says some amazingly beautiful things during the struggle with his friends. **Read Job 19:25, Job 23:10-12, Job 27:6.** Job speaks for 5 chapters (27-31). He remembers his former life of fortune, fame, and family and he mourns the life he has now. He asserts his righteousness; in fact, many commentators say that Job has shifted to regale his own righteousness instead of God's.

### C. Our Surrender

**Finally, God speaks.** Chapter 38-42 is God speaking, actually putting Job on trial, asking Job a series of rhetorical questions. Notice however what God does not say. **1)** He never tells Job about the confrontation between God and Satan in chapters 1&2. The reader knows it, but not Job—ever. For us, we need to remember in adversity that there are things going on in the heavenlies that we know nothing of. God is always at work, always our advocate, always sovereign, wise, and love. **2)** God does not answer any of Job’s questions. **3)** God does not apologize or explain Himself. **4)** God never acknowledges Job’s trials.

Read some of the questions God asks Job. **Job 38:4, Job 38:12, 16-18.** These chapters are beautiful poetic language, going through every aspect of creation, reiterating God’s Majesty. Job silently listens. When he is finally able to respond, it is with deep humility and submission to God. **Read Job 42:1-6.** Job has not had his questions answered, but he has learned through adversity to trust the Almighty. He has a fuller perspective of who God is, a perspective he could have never know without adversity.

Elizabeth Elliot says that God is doing things in our soul that we are not at all interested in. We would rather have pleasant circumstance and live contentedly with small faith and little trust. But God has a work to do in us, conforming us to the image of His Son. He requires surrender... an abandonment of our will to His. He speaks, we listen. He leads, we follow. He is the Almighty, and we are His servants.

The story of Job ends with God restoring Job’s fortune, giving him a new family, and long life. So, is this a “happily ever after” story? Not at all. Job will never be the same. His life is forever marked by the Almighty. His faith is unshakable because his faith has been shaken.

*“For I am confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in  
\_\_\_\_(your name)\_\_\_\_ will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6*

Recommended reading:

*Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* by Jerry Bridges

*When God is Silent* by Charles Swindoll

*Hinds Feet on High Places* by Hannah Hurnard