

During a tragedy in West Virginia, 11 coal miners were killed following an explosion in the mine. One woman, deeply shaken by the loss of her loved one said, *"We're good Christians. We have been praying for their survival. And now we don't know if there is a God."* Many a Christian has been there. A tragedy strikes us out of the blue and we think in our hearts, **"Life's not fair!"** We may even wonder, "Is there really a God?"

The book of Job deals with the timeless questions of suffering and loss. Even though the story is four thousand years old, it could have been written yesterday. The greatest question of the book of Job is the question of undeserved suffering. Why do bad things happen to good people? More pointedly, why do bad things happen to God's people?

Through the ages thoughtful people have pondered that question. Why do babies die? Why are innocent people held hostage by madmen? Why is someone righteous passed over for promotion while evil people seem to get away with murder? Job doesn't answer those questions with a theory; it answers them with a story. We're invited to examine one man whose life caved in on him. Why did that happen and what did he do about it? Please turn to Job 1:1-5 (p. 417).

Job was a man who had it all. Chapter one unquestionably reveals what a great man Job was. Talk about having your act together: Spiritual integrity. Loving father. Successful businessman. Sterling reputation. Job was the total package. There's not a one of us who wouldn't have loved to trade sandals with Job. Even God said, *"There is no one like him on the earth."*

a) Job's faith was strong and alive. The most important area of anyone's life is their faith, their personal walk with God. Scripture tells us that Job was a man of great faith, *"blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil."* Job had a deeply personal relationship with God and walked with Him closely. He knew God intimately.

We find **four key aspects** about Job's faith from this passage. **First**, Job was *"blameless."* Now this doesn't mean that Job was sinless, but rather blameless and there's a huge difference. *Sinless* is vertical, *blameless* is horizontal. Vertically, everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard (Rom. 3:23), Job included. Horizontally, as Job lived before the watchful eye of his peers, no one could justly charge Job with moral failure. He walked with integrity. Not with hypocrisy or duplicity but without moral blemish. And everyone knew it.

Second, Job was *upright*. The word literally means *straight*, in the sense of walking a straight path. Not deviating from God's standards. Job walked the straight and narrow path that leads to life. He stayed on track, not drifting away into worldliness. His walk matched his talk.

Third, Job *feared God*. Fearing God means to be filled with awe, reverence, and respect for Him. It means to take God very seriously. To honor who He is, obey what He says and tremble at what He does. It's not the fear of a cowering kid before the neighborhood bully. It's the high respect one feels at being in the Oval Office and meeting the President. It's the fear of being in the presence of one far superior. Job deeply revered God. He had a high view of God. *"The remarkable thing about fearing God,"* notes Oswald Chambers, *"is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."*

Fourth, Job *turned away from evil*. Job rejected all that was contrary to God's holiness. Job knew how to "just say no." He didn't buckle under peer pressure but resisted temptation and the enticing lure of the world.

That's Job's spiritual life. He's an extraordinary man. A sincere believer. A devout man, fully committed to God...hardly a candidate for a disaster.

b) Job's family was full and blessed. If one's faith is most important, what's second? Your family life. It's not surprising to discover that Job was the father of a large, close-knit family. He had *"seven sons and three daughters"* (1:2). The numbers seven and three signify completeness in the Old Testament Hebrew and are signs of God's favor.

Job enjoyed an ideal family. His children loved each other and met regularly to enjoy one another's presence. This was a family greatly blessed by God.

c) Job's fortune was vast and great. Following one's walk with God and one's home life, a person's career would usually be next. We're not surprised to learn that Job was a very successful businessman. *"His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants"* (1:3). In ancient days, wealth was measured by one's property—like land, animals, and servants. He was a Warren Buffet of his day. By spelling out details about the sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys, our text is telling us that if a list of the world's richest people had been printed 4,000 years ago, Job would have been at the top.

Job had every symbol of success. His garage was full of cars. His closet was lined with suits. His walk-in refrigerator and freezer were stocked with the best food. He had a hired crew always working at his house—cutting the hedge, painting the house, washing and folding the clothes, edging the driveway. He was living out most people's dreams. He

had it all! People can be divided into three classes; the Haves, the Have-Nots, and the Have-Not-Paid-For-What-They-Haves (where most of us live!). Job was a gold card member in good standing of the Haves. He was loaded!

Job was, and this is still a very rare combination to find, both godly and wealthy. Two qualities rarely found together. He played in both leagues, laying up treasure in Heaven and on earth...hardly a candidate for disaster.

d) Job's parenting was spiritual and sacrificial. Finally, to complete our portrait of Job, we need to know that he was a good father, deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of his children. Unquestionably, he was the spiritual leader of his house. Too many parents are successful in the marketplace, but failures at home. Many sacrifice their children on the altar of their career. But not Job. He avoided such a deadly swap, remaining faithful to his family. He kept his priorities straight and on balance. Job balanced these competing demands with great skill and grace.

So here's Job. Have you ever met anyone like him? If these first five verses of his book were all we had to go on, every single one of us would love to trade places with this successful man. He's hardly a candidate for disaster. Job walked with God too closely. He led his family too carefully. He loved his children too deeply. All Heaven has broken loose...hardly a candidate for disaster.

This fact is absolutely crucial to understanding his story so let me say it carefully: *What happened to Job happened because he was a godly person!* Nothing in the book of Job makes sense unless that's true. Job is a case study in the suffering of the righteous. As hard as it may be to understand, it was his righteousness and prosperity that brought on his enormous suffering. Yet the suffering was undeserved in the truest sense of the word.

While you ponder that, consider what happens next. The story suddenly shifts to Job's first test. The scene changes from earth to heaven. Job never knew about this part. While he was on the earth tending to his vast holdings, Satan was having a conversation with God. Look at verses 6-12.

This passage answers a prevailing misconception about Satan. If you asked the average Christian, "Where is Satan today?" most will say that Satan is in hell. But the Bible doesn't teach that. If Satan were in hell today, we'd have no problems. In this age our world is under his power and domination. The day will come when Satan and all his hordes will be cast into the lake of fire forever, but that won't happen until Jesus returns to this earth. Between now and then, Satan roams the earth as a roaring lion, seeking men and women he can devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

My point is that it was Satan that was behind what happened to Job. Job never knew that and God never told him, but the writer of the book of Job lets us peek behind the heavenly curtain to see the unfolding drama. That brings us to some critical questions.

Critical Question #1: Do we love God or do we just love the benefits of God? In verse 9 we come to the key question of the book: *"Does Job fear God for nothing?"* Satan accuses God of bribing Job into worshipping Him. After all, Job has it all: a huge, loving family, enormous wealth, a great reputation...everything in this world a man could want. No wonder he worships God. Who wouldn't? Satan accuses God of rigging the system. It's as if there were a contract between Job and God that went like this: *"I'll be good, and You will bless me. I'll be pious, and You will give me prosperity."* Satan is attacking Job's motive and God's integrity. Here is the key question: ***Will anyone serve God for no personal gain?***

Satan says the answer is no. Job will worship God only when things are going his way. So he says in verse 11, *"But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."*

Satan's question is the supreme question of life that all believers must face: *You served God in the sunshine; will you now serve Him in the shadows? You believed Him in the light of day; will you still believe Him at midnight? You sang His praises when all was going well; will you still sing through your tears? You came to church and declared, 'The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.' Is He still your shepherd in the valley of the shadow of death? He was good enough for you when you had money in the bank. Is He good enough for you when you have no money at all? He was good enough for you when you had your health. Is He good enough when the doctor says, 'You have six months to live'? He was good enough when you were married. Is He good enough when the one you love walks out on you? He was good enough when your family was all together. Is He good enough when you stand around an open grave?* It's easy to believe in God when everything is going your way. Anyone can do that.

Let's give what happened next a contemporary perspective. Imagine if Job was living today, if he was a modern day business person. His business is doing better than most. He has a lovely family. They all get along though they sometimes have differences of opinions. They know how to forgive and forget. As an independent business man/entrepreneur, Job is highly respected. He's a pillar in the community. He attends church regularly and is an active participant. As a matter of fact, his ten children are active missionaries to the Honduras. Got the picture? Now look at verses 13-19.

Have you ever taken one of those tests designed to measure the stress in your life? Typically, the test lists some fifty stress-producing events and assigns a numerical score to each event. Some events have a relatively low point value:

moving to a new home, 20 points. Trouble with in-laws, 29 points. Others produce much more stress: Divorce, 73 points. Death of a spouse, 100 points. You simply check off the events that have happened to you in the last twelve months and then total up the points. According to the test, if your total score for a year is from 0 to 150, you have only a 37% chance of undergoing a severe mental or emotional crisis in the next two years. If your score is from 150 to 300, the probability rises to 51%. But if your score is over 300, there is an 80% probability that you will soon face a severe mental or emotional crisis. The stress level in your life is simply too high. Job's stress level is in the danger zone at this point. He has lost it all—not in a year or six months but in a single afternoon.

That teaches a solemn lesson...tragedy is not a respecter of persons. You can be on top of the world and lose it all in the twinkling of an eye. Tragedy can come to the same house again and again, and there is nothing to do to stop it. That brings us to critical question #2.

Critical Question #2: How will we respond when our world caves in? What's Job's response? Look at verses 20-22.

a) There is genuine grief. "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head" (v. 20). These are the actions of a man whose heart has been torn apart. They're public symbols of inner pain, much like wearing black to a funeral.

Some Christians wrongly think that it's wrong to grieve over a great loss. They believe that tears somehow show a lack of faith in God. They have trouble dealing with people who show great emotion after a severe loss. But Scripture never says that. We're told that "*Jesus wept*" (John 11:35). Our Lord knows what we're going through because He's here with us. He knows what it's like to die of a broken heart. If our Lord was not ashamed of His tears, we shouldn't be ashamed of ours.

b) There is sincere worship. "Then he fell to the ground in worship" (1:20). It's the ultimate response of the man of faith in the face of unexplainable tragedy. He weeps and then he worships. This is what differentiates the Christian from the rest of the world. They weep; we weep. They get angry; we worship. Our sorrow is just as real as theirs, but their sorrow leads only to despair, whereas ours leads to worship.

c) There is a great statement of faith. Verse 21 records Job's great statement of faith. He says three things. "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.*" All babies are born naked. We have a phrase for it, a naked person is wearing his "birthday suit." It's just as true at the end of life. We bring nothing with us and take nothing with us. An Italian proverb says, "*The last robe has no pockets.*" When you die, you leave it all behind. All we have is given to us on temporary loan. No matter how much we've been given in this life, we can't keep it.

"*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.*" This is the man of faith speaking. This statement rises above the first. People of faith understand that all that we have, we never owned in the first place. All that we have was given to us by God. He can take what is rightfully His any time He wants. Because He is God, He doesn't have to ask our permission before He takes it back, nor does He have to explain Himself afterward.

"*May the name of the Lord be praised.*" Job's faith now rises to its highest level ever. He has lost it all. All that he counted dear in this life has been ripped from his grasp. Yet in the midst of his pain, Job praises God.

Please don't miss this: *Job draws his argument for praise from the bitterness of suffering.* His loss drives him back to the goodness of God. Every pain is a reminder of how good God has been to him. Every tear is a way of saying, "Thank you, Lord, for what You gave me." In Job's case, the more he grieves, the more he blesses the name of the Lord.

Conclusion: Let me end today with some vital take home truths. Our text ends with these amazing words, "*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing*" (v. 22). He didn't ask why, he didn't accuse God of not loving him, he didn't claim his rights or curse God...and he didn't give up his faith. He simply said to himself, "If God takes something away from me; I will thank Him that I had it to enjoy for just a little while." As I ponder this remarkable story, **Four Conclusions** come to mind.

1. Undeserved suffering often comes to righteous men and women. This is an obvious lesson. Though we've heard it before, we need to hear it again. Three times the text emphasizes that Job was a righteous man. What happened to him did not happen because of any moral fault or hidden sin in his life. It's a human tendency when tragedy strikes to believe that if we'd only lived a better life, the tragedy would never have happened. If Job's story teaches us anything, it's that sometimes the godliest people suffer the most unexplainable losses. Terrible things happen to the godliest people.

2. God is the source and owner of all you have. God is the ultimate source of all that you have, and He has the absolute right to take that which belongs to Him. Your house? It's His. Your job? It's His. Your future? It's His. Your health? It's His. Your children? Yes, even your children are His. They belonged to Him before they ever belonged to you. Your husband or your wife? Yes, even your husband or your wife. All that you have belongs to God. And in the end, you will give it all back to Him. Sometimes He will take back something sooner than you would like to give it. But that is His absolute right, for He is God.

3. Your personal trials relate to God's purpose for your life. Your personal trials are never caused by blind fate or bad luck. They all somehow relate to God's purpose for your life. If this were not true, the Bible would not be true. If you don't come to believe this, you'll eventually give up your faith. When tragedy strikes, the tendency is to search for some cause that would explain the catastrophe you now face. But as you search for causes, you will go back, and back, and back, until at last you ultimately come to God. If you do not eventually conclude that what happens to you somehow flows from God's loving purpose for your life, you will sooner or later give up your faith altogether.

4. Trials are designed to draw you nearer to God. The one great Biblical purpose for trials is to draw you nearer to God. The question is not, "Why did this happen to me?" The deeper question is, "Now that this has happened, will I remain loyal to God?"

If we turn away from our faith in times of trouble, what are we going to turn to? Haven't we lost enough without losing that too? When life crashes in against us and all that we value most is taken from us, if we then give up our faith, where will we go and what will we do?

Steve Brown tells about a seminar one of his associate pastors was leading. During one session, the associate pastor said that because God is love, no matter how bad things get, Christians should praise Him.

Afterwards, a man came up to him in great agitation. "Dave, I can't buy it. I can't buy what you say about praising God in the midst of evil and hurt." Then he went on to say what many people secretly feel. "*I do not believe that when you lose someone you love through death, or you have cancer, or you lose your job, that you ought to praise God.*" After a moment's silence, the associate pastor replied very simply, "*What alternative do you propose?*"

We do not gain if we turn away from God in the time of trouble. If we turn away from God, we lose our only ground of hope. As the Apostle Paul puts it, what can separate us from the love of God? Nothing at all. Not life, nor death, nor tragedy, nor heartbreak, nor suffering. We are forever connected to His love with cords a thousand times stronger than steel. Through our tears and pain, we still go on believing.

Our confidence rests in this: *That the One who brought us this far will take us safely Home.* We're always safe with the Father. We're always safe in His love.