

How God Tests His Friends

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. As has been mentioned, my name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here at Brunnsfield. And this morning, it is my joy to preach Job chapter 1, a book I've wanted to preach for many years.

But before we dive into God's Word, let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning and we are going to look at a somewhat difficult passage with some hard truths for us to learn.

And yet we thank you that it will be for your glory and that we will learn to praise you. Father, would you soften our hearts and open our ears.

Help us focus on the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Now we serve a wonderful God who works in ways that we may never fully comprehend.

If you didn't tune in last week, please do go to our YouTube channel or tune in to the website and re-listen to Wayne Sutton's sermon on Genesis 22 about the testing of faith through trials.

[1 : 13] Because without knowing it, Wayne actually gave us a phenomenal introduction to the book of Job and particularly to chapter 1, which is our focus this morning.

Because this morning is all about how God tests his friends. How God tests his friends. We are going to sit with Job for the next few weeks together as he wrestles with the question that we all ask when suffering comes our way.

Why? Why me? And friends, there is no shortcut to the lessons in the book of Job. Our suffering, in our suffering we have a choice.

It can either push us towards God and glorify him and run to him for dependence for our everyday. Or it can push us away from God and it can cause us to fester hatred in our heart for him.

I guess the three popular ways to think about suffering today are one, to think that it is meaningless or two, to think that suffering is a result of pure evil and that God is mean and sadistic for letting it happen.

[2 : 28] Or three, to think that there is some cosmic battle between good and evil, between God and Satan and that when suffering happens, God is just messed up.

Have any of you thought in any of these ways before? I know I have. There have certainly been times in my life where I've thought these things. But I can say with confidence that all three of these are wrong.

Suffering does not happen because God is inferior or God is evil. And suffering is not meaningless. And I'd like to suggest to you this morning that suffering can happen as a result of God's love for his people.

See, God loves his people so much that he tests the genuineness of their faith through suffering. Now maybe you think I've lost the plot.

But I want to challenge us all this morning to consider how wonderful the news is that God is in absolute control, even of our suffering.

[3 : 37] Now it doesn't make it easy, but it should encourage us because of who this God is. He is good. He is perfect. He is holy. And he loves his people.

Now of course we have questions about that and we can't deny those. I would encourage you to voice those difficult questions. Ask the hard questions. Have those uncomfortable conversations with God and with other Christians.

If you've got questions about pain and suffering, like I guarantee all of us do, stick around. Because we are going to embark on a journey that will encourage, that will challenge, and will unsettle all of us.

Job is one of those books that people either really love to read and they dwell in it so often, or they really don't like it and want to avoid it at all costs. Basically the whole book is the story of one man's suffering.

At the beginning Job is living the high life. Everything is going his way, but all of it is stripped away. We saw the beginning of that in the reading. And he is devastated.

[4 : 49] Now I don't want to spoil it for us, but the main teaching point of the book of Job is this. God is glorified when his people suffer well.

God is glorified when his people suffer well. And that is why it is such an important book for us to think about as a whole church family, because each and every one of us will suffer at one point or another.

It is inevitable. In fact, the Bible tells us to expect suffering. Calamities will come your way. For many of you, those times of suffering have already come.

And how we respond to God in those moments of suffering is hugely important, because the chief aim of humanity is to glorify God. The goal of every single Christian is to become more and more like Jesus every single day.

To grow in holiness. And that means of transformation is often through suffering. And the Bible calls us to suffer well for the glory of God.

[6 : 01] That is what wise living looks like. And Job is what we call wisdom literature. It teaches us truths that help us grow in wisdom and holy living.

Now, apart from the first two chapters and a bit at the end of the book, Job is largely poetry. Now, Hebrew poetry is quite different from modern poetry that we have today.

It's quite structured. It's quite ordered. Its purpose is to express biblical truth. Raw emotions.

And I mean, heart wrenching emotions. And experiences using imagery. And there are word plays and parallels all over it.

So why did God give us this book as poetry? Well, I think it's so that it gets under our skin. So that we feel what Job is feeling.

[6 : 58] So that we can learn the hard truths with him as we sit in a heap on the floor and we weep. And God in his wisdom has given us a long book, 42 chapters of poetry to help us see that he is glorified when his people suffer well.

The length of the book also tells us that we won't get to the answers of suffering quickly. We may never get the answers to suffering. You can't really sum up the whole book of Job in a soundbite or in a snappy little tweet.

I have spent the last eight years in Job as I've experienced suffering in my own life. And we've got 11 weeks to dive into this marvelous book.

So I would encourage you all, please do read it at home. Read the passages before you come to church. Read the whole book at your at home, at your leisure and jot down thoughts and questions. Find me an email, grab me after church and let's wrestle with and unpack this gem of wisdom literature that God has given us. as we try to journey through life and learn how to glorify God by suffering well.

[8 : 15] And so to that end, let's dive into Job chapter one and see how God tests his friends. Keep the Bible open in front of you. We'll be diving in and out.

And the first thing that we see in this passage is the man in verses one to five, the man. Now these five verses set the scene and tell us all about the man Job, whose life was going tremendously well. Look at the description of Job's character and life in verse one. Read with me. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil.

Now this doesn't mean that Job was perfect. He was sinful like every other human being in the world, but this means that he was a genuine believer in God.

Blameless refers to his life being characterized with integrity. And it speaks of his devotion and his commitment to God. Upright means that Job lived a godly life.

[9 : 22] That he made wise and ethical decisions. And his life is summarized as being someone who feared God and shunned evil. Job was a godly man.

But he was also a wealthy man as we see in verses two to three. He had many camels and sheep, oxen and donkeys. He was a businessman who had acquired wealth in his life.

So much so that the end of verse three says that Job was the greatest among all the people of the east. So Job was a godly man.

He was a wealthy man. But he was also a family man. Verse two says that he had seven sons and three daughters. But notice how he leads or how he led his family.

And how he raised his kids in verse four. The kids would gather together and they would have feasts at appointed times. They'd have a big party. And what does Job do after those parties?

[10:24] Verse five. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them.

Thinking, perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Job's desire was that his kids would follow in his footsteps.

That they too would be seen as blameless and upright. That they would be devoted to the Lord.

And so he regularly rose early.

And goes through purification rituals with them and for them. And offers burnt offerings just in case they had sinned against God. He wants his kids to have the exact same zeal and devotion and passion for righteousness that he had in his life.

Now it's interesting because all of these things point to Job being a bit like one of the patriarchs.

One of the forefathers of the Israelites like Abraham or Jacob that we see in the book of Genesis.

[11:33] He's offering sacrifices like a priest on behalf of his children. He's acting like a mediator between them and God.

But like every human being, he is sinful. And he realizes that sin is rife in the lives of his children.

And later on in the book, he acknowledges it in himself too.

Now all of this is to say that Job was a real man. Who lived a good life and who was a genuine believer.

And that needs to be stated and understood because of what happens in the next few verses.

Because of the suffering that comes his way. But before we get there, we need to learn something from these five verses.

And friends, that is that karma is not a thing. The calamities that are about to tear Job's life apart are not a result of sin or wrongdoing in his life.

[12:32] The horrible things that are about to happen are not because Job has messed up and God is punishing him. Job isn't going to live in the valley of despair for a long time because of something he has done.

Now maybe you're here this morning. And you're going through the wars. Maybe your life feels like it's spiraling out of control and it's an absolute mess.

Most of the time our suffering in the Christian life is not a result of our own sin. We don't go through fiery ordeals because God is punishing us.

Please don't think that. And God doesn't dish out rewards and disasters to his people based on some kind of performance review at the end of every year.

Job is about to have his world turned upside down as a test. Which will prove the genuineness of his faith.

[13:41] That's what suffering does. Why? Because the glory of God is far, far more important than our comfort.

Friends, take comfort because even in your suffering you are being pushed further to the Lord. You are being pushed further in your spiritual growth and dependence on God.

You should not worship God for his stuff. Worship God for who he is. We are not blessed when we obey and chastise when we fail.

Our chief aim as Christians is to glorify God. To grow in holiness. To become like Jesus. And the means of that is often through suffering. Many of you will know how easy it is to forget reading our Bibles and praying when life is easy.

We fill our diaries when life is rosy. We go and meet friends when suffering comes. That's the moment where we hit the decks and we pray our hearts out.

[14:51] Suffering can be a blessing in disguise because it makes us cling to God. And it makes us more like Jesus as we learn to suffer well for God's glory.

So this is Job. He is a real man. A godly man. A devout man with genuine faith. A man who feared God and shunned evil.

But now we get a change of scene in verse 6. And we get a unique glimpse of what goes on in heaven behind the scenes. And the second thing we see in this passage is a heavenly court.

In verses 6 to 12. The heavenly court. This scene is a bit like a courtroom. So God is the absolute supreme ruler who is in control of every single thing.

And yet he governs the world through the means of supernatural powers and beings. Read verse 6 with me. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came with them.

[16:01] So you can imagine the scene. God is on his throne and the angels are coming and they're bringing their updates of what's been going on on the world. And Satan is there too. Our Bibles say Satan.

Often referred to as the devil. And the Hebrew word there that is used means accuser. Satan is the one who is always opposed to God and his ways.

Always sowing doubt and lies in people's minds. acting as our accuser. Now some say that Satan has barged into this courtroom.

And that he's a bit of a party crasher. That he's stumbled in uninvited and unwanted. But I think it makes more sense in the context. And in the events that follow on from this.

That Satan is a regular attendee to this heavenly court. Because after all, Satan is under God's control. In verse 7, it's Satan's turn to give an update to his recent activities and goings on in the world.

[17:12] And a bit like a disgruntled teenager muttering under his breath. He says, well, you know, I've been walking around here and there. Doing a bit of stuff. He says, I've been roaming throughout the earth.

Going back and forth on it. You can hear that he's a bit like a 13 year old teenager. But now comes something that maybe you weren't expecting. Verse 8.

God says to Satan, well, in all of your wondering, have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him. He is blameless and upright.

A man who fears God and shuns evil. How marvelous is it that God says that about one of his people? It is God who flags Job to Satan.

God is the one who puts Job on display as a great example of godliness and holiness. But then look at what the accuser does living up to his name in verses 9 to 11.

[18:14] And Satan basically says, well, of course, Job loves you. Look at everything you've given him. Do you really think that he is a devout believer because of who you are, God?

You think you're that great? Take away all this stuff and watch his faith crumble to the point of non-existence. Because Satan thinks that Job's faith is not because of who God is, but because of God's stuff and some kind of protection that God has put around him.

Now what happens next might be shocking, but let's keep, remember to keep the perspective of how God tests his friends. Verse 12.

God says, very well then, everything he has is in your power, but the man himself do not lay a finger on him. Now God is not being baited into testing Job.

Satan hasn't won here at all. But God is testing Job to prove the genuineness of his faith. And God tests Job because God's glory is far more important than Job's comfort.

[19:30] Now I know that we all probably have a million questions about this passage and exactly how and why it happens. I know I've still got questions about it. And I would love to unpack some of those with you later on.

But the thing that we need to understand from verses 6 to 12 is that Satan is under the absolute control of a sovereign God.

That means that Satan cannot go even one millimeter beyond what God has ordained. Satan is not an enemy roaming around in freedom with all the ability in the world to devour and destroy that what is God's.

Satan is a dog on a chain. Bound to work within the parameters of what God permits him to do in God's unbelievable, absolute wisdom.

And you see that in verse 12. Don't you? Satan needs God's permission before he can even think about doing anything to Job. Because Satan is inferior. He is a created being.

[20:45] And he is under God's rule. Satan is not some second deity who can do as he pleases. Satan is bound like a dog on a chain. Only able to work in ways that God allows him to.

And Satan was allowed. He was given permission by God to test Job. Satan thought the outcome would be a destruction of faith.

But it is to prove the genuineness of Job's faith. And friends, this should encourage us because it means that our suffering is not meaningless.

It may feel like that, but it is not. The problem is that in our modern secularist culture, we've been trained to think that suffering can have no part in life, that there is no purpose to it.

And our life must be full of freedom and happiness all the time. Suffering doesn't fit into that worldview. And so people who've maybe never given a second thought to God in their lives, suddenly when suffering hits, they think, I hate God.

[21 : 53] But most other cultures in the world and worldviews in the world know that there are benefits to suffering.

That there are often reasons for suffering in a person's life. And for a really thought-provoking analysis of different cultural approaches, I'd encourage you to read Tim Keller's book, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*.

I've read tons of books on suffering over the years, and that is by far the best book I've read on the topic. But the thing is, the Bible makes it clear that suffering is not meaningless.

It doesn't answer all of our questions about suffering. That's not the point of the Bible. The book of Job doesn't answer all of our questions about suffering. But it tells us that suffering can, and suffering does, have a purpose.

If you want a New Testament example of this, look at 2 Corinthians 4, 16-18. Therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day for our light and momentary troubles, those are the sufferings of this world, are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

[23 : 17] So what do we do? We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Job didn't see the heavenly court. He didn't see what was going on. He saw the temporary things that were producing eternal glory because of the genuineness of his faith.

So friends, your suffering is not meaningless. And please know this. Your suffering is not outwith the control of God.

He knows you. He knows what you're going through. And friends, even though it might not feel like it at times, even though it can be a really hard pill to swallow, God might be testing your faith.

You, his servant. To prove the genuineness of your faith. To make you run to him.

[24 : 39] Independence. And the challenge is, here do we love God for his stuff? Or do we love God for who he is?

We need to ask ourselves, would we still love God if everything I knew was taken away? We might only know the answer to that question when that day comes.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to invest in our suffering now. Because when suffering comes our way, the moment our faith is put to the test, we need to know for sure that we are being tested by a loving, heavenly father, not because Satan is one.

He is a defeated foe. So the heavenly court teaches us that God is in absolute control.

And the third and final thing we see in this passage is the earthly disaster. In verses 13 to 22. The earthly disaster. Verse 13 begins with these words.

[25 : 48] Read along with me. One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, the oxen were plowing and donkeys were grazing nearby and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them.

They put the servants to the sword. And I am the only one who's escaped to tell you. Think back to Job's life in verses one to five.

Everything was going well. Life was rosy. He had great wealth, a great family. He'd worked his whole life and was reaping the benefits of that. But now in one day, one day, everything will change. There's a heartbreaking repetition in these verses that should bring a tear to our eyes as we read them.

And we should weep with Job when we hear this. The repetition is in verses. It starts in verse 14 where it says, A messenger came to Job and said, and it continues in verses 16, 17 and 18 by saying, While he was still speaking, another messenger came.

[27 : 08] And each messenger comes with a devastating, life-changing, heart-wrenching blow that would take the wind out of any single one of us.

News that would floor the calmest and most stable of people. It was traumatizing. In verses 13 to 15, the messenger says that the oxen and donkeys were stolen and all of the servants were killed. In verse 16, All the sheep were consumed by fire, presumably a forest fire or something like that, and all the servants were killed. In verse 17, The camels were all stolen by an enemy attack and all the servants were killed.

And in verses 18 and 19, the messenger comes and says that during a feast at one of his son's house, a mighty wind swept through and the house collapsed, killing everyone inside.

Suddenly all ten of his children dead. Now you have to sit with Job in that suffering.

[28 : 28] Do you feel his pain? Everything he'd worked for, everything he knew, everything he owned, even his own children.

God in the flesh, everything taken from him. Now I'm not a parent, but I know friends who've lost children. And it is horrific, horrific to see that pain.

So imagine how Job feels as he hears the news that all of his children are dead and everything he has has been stolen or destroyed.

And you see again another repetition in verses 15, 16, 17, and 19. Each messenger ends with the same words, I am the only one who has escaped to tell you.

Now I know what would be going through my sinful heart if that was me. Why? Why were you saved and not my child? Did you even do anything to stop them stealing my livelihood?

[29 : 58] Why is this happening to me? Why? Why? Why? We naturally ask why, don't we?

When a parent dies, when a child dies, when that doctor gives you that diagnosis that you were never expecting, when you lose your job, when your whole world is shaken and everything seems lost, we naturally fall to our knees and we ask why.

And friends, let me say that God is big enough for your questions. God will not crumble if you ask why. Too often we think that our questions or our doubts will separate us from God, but the Bible says nonsense.

You take those questions and run to him. That's what the Bible says, run to God in your suffering. But Job is a far godlier man than I am.

Look at his amazing response in verses 20 to 21. At this, Job got up and tore his robe, shaved his head, and then he fell to the ground in worship and said, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart.

[31 : 22] The Lord gave. The Lord gave. And the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.

Job fell to the ground in mourning. He tore his robe, cut his hair, Old Testament signs of grief and mourning, but then he worshipped. Now how can someone worship after such horrific suffering? Because Job knows the God who is in control of all of this. He knows that behind all of this agony and pain is a good God who is perfect and who is holy and whose wisdom is far beyond anything we can comprehend.

How does the sovereignty of God help us as we suffer? Well, what's the alternative? That God is weak and has nothing to say? That there's no purpose in our suffering?

God being in control even over our suffering should comfort us because of who this sovereign God is. He is perfectly good. He loves his people and he even sacrificed his own son taking immense suffering on himself on our behalf.

[32 : 52] Everything God does is pure and perfect and out of a deep love for his people. And it's in that context that we need to view our suffering. That is Job's perspective.

And that's what it looks like to invest in your suffering. We need to remind ourselves of the great God who is in absolute control knowing who he really is and that will carry us through the darkest of times.

But in that weeping and in that pain to know that God is in absolute control is to say with Job the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job is letting his suffering push him into the arms of a good God and he's mourning. Now friends, one of the lessons I've been learning over the last few years of my life as I've been suffering is that God is always there.

You can be on the mountaintops and be doing great. God is there. You can be in the valley of despair and deep darkness where darkness is your closest friend.

[34 : 15] God is there. If you're in the midst of pain and suffering, God is there. And if you're calling out for death, like Job later on does, God is there.

But the lesson is this, as Tim Keller so wonderfully and succinctly puts it, you don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.

You don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. Job's suffering was not meaningless.

It was teaching him, as we'll see as we get to the end of the book, that God is in control and that his glory is far, far more important than Job's comfort. Friends, Job was a real man who was not perfect.

He suffered tremendously and the genuineness of his faith was proven to be real. And yet Job is just a foreshadow of someone else who was perfect.

[35 : 21] Jesus Christ, the only sinless person to have ever walked the face of the earth. The man who suffered not because of his own sin, but because of yours and because of mine. Jesus was also perfect in his response to suffering.

In the Garden of Gethsemane with the crucifixion on the horizon and the agony that he knew would come his way. What did he say? He prayed, Father, not my will, but yours be done.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered so that all who call on him can be forgiven, restored, and find strength even in the darkest of times.

God tests Job to prove the genuineness of his faith. you might suffer to test the genuineness of your faith. And my prayer is that every single one of us will be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with Job and say, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Let's pray together. Amen. Father, maybe just in the quietness for a few moments let us reflect on the difficulty of suffering but let us ponder the greatness of our God and be honest about our pain.

[36 : 48] Father, some of us are in the middle of that valley of despair.

For some of us suffering is a constant companion. Lord, we come to you and we cry out for your help.

Lord, we come to you and we cry out for your help. Father, for some of us we may not know suffering yet in our lives and yet, Father, we pray that you would be preparing us for that day of suffering when it comes because it will.

Father, give us the strength by your Spirit to say those words the Lord gives and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Father, help us live well in our suffering for your glory. In Jesus' name we pray.

[37 : 59] Amen. Amen. Amen.