

This morning is the second week in a new sermon series I am doing on suffering, loss, lament, and trust. Certainly we are going through a season of suffering and loss as a world, as a country, and for most of us, individually as well, and **if somehow you've escaped suffering, well, just give it time** and suffering will come your way, because it's inescapable in this life. Fortunately for us, the Bible gives us a pattern of prayer known as lament that is meant to help us to process our pain in a way that leads us to a better state of mind and soul. I'm using Mark Vroegop's definition of lament as "a prayer through pain that leads to trust." Last week I began in Psalm 13, which gives us a good, brief model of what a prayer of lament looks like. As we saw in that Psalm, lament consists of four movements: turn to God, voice your complaint, ask boldly, and choose to trust. As you can imagine, in most situations in life, a prayer of lament is not always this neat and tidy as you cry out from your pain, but Psalm 13 gives you a good idea of what is involved in lament.

Now, laments can be both individual and corporate. Next week we will be looking at a corporate lament in the book of Lamentations. This morning, we are going to look at a very long individual lament from the book of Job. If you're unfamiliar with who Job is, let me read you his background in Job 1:1-5:

*In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. <sup>2</sup> He had seven sons and three daughters, <sup>3</sup> and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. <sup>4</sup> His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them 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." This was Job's regular custom.*

So we learn from the intro that Job is a very righteous man who is devoted to God and is very wealthy. He is so devoted that he would offer sacrifices for his children just in case they had sinned. Now, to help us truly step into Job's shoes, we are going to skip the rest of the beginning for now, which gives the behind-the-scenes conversation between God and Satan, and go straight to Job's suffering.

<sup>13</sup> *One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup> a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans attacked and*

*carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"* <sup>16</sup> *While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"* <sup>17</sup> *While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"* <sup>18</sup> *While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house,* <sup>19</sup> *when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"* <sup>20</sup> *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship* <sup>21</sup> *and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* <sup>22</sup> *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

In the span of a day, Job loses most of his wealth, his servants, and his children. He responds in mourning, but also in worship. But soon after that, Job's health is attacked, as he is afflicted with painful sores from head to toe.

<sup>8</sup> *Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.* <sup>9</sup> *His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"* <sup>10</sup> *He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"* *In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.* <sup>11</sup> *When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.* <sup>12</sup> *When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads.* <sup>13</sup> *Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*

Job loses almost everything – his wealth, his children, and finally his health - and he has no idea why. We as readers know why, which I will get to later, but Job doesn't, and so it would be good for us to put ourselves in his shoes and see how he responds, because most of the time when we suffer, we are not privy to the reasons behind it. For the next 35 or so chapters, Job will have conversations with his three friends, and then with another young man, who try to convince him that

he must have done something wrong to deserve such suffering, while Job argues with them and pours out his heart to God.

### Turn to God

Despite all that happens to him, and despite the fact that he feels like his suffering is completely unjust and undeserved, Job will not turn away from God.

As Michael Card writes in his book *A Sacred Sorrow*:

*“In Job, we discover a person who will simply not let go of God in spite of death, disease, isolation from friends and family, and ultimately a perceived abandonment by God. Those around him, including his own wife, plead for him to let go and die. But Job, like Jacob, faithfully holds on in the wrestling match of his life. And like Jacob, he no doubt limped for the rest of his faithful and God-haunted life.”*

This is a real challenge when suffering and loss come our way. We all know people who have turned their back on God because of a loss they experienced in their life and their inability to reconcile their suffering with a God of love. And we have probably all been guilty of complaining to others about what we are going through without ever turning to God to voice our complaint in lament. But Job turns to God and will not go.

### Voice your complaint

The second movement of lament is to express honestly our hurts, doubt, disappointments, fears, and whatever other emotions we have to God. As I mentioned last week, some of you have never done this because you feel it's disrespectful to complain to God, or like complaining is a sign that you do not trust Him. Others of you may be afraid that if you give voice to your negative emotions, that you will be attracting negativity your way. But it is okay to pour out your emotions honestly to God. In fact, it's encouraged. If the Psalms did not convince you that it is okay to pour out all your emotions to God, Job should do the job. Listen to just a few of the things he says to God:

**Job 3:1-11** - *After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. <sup>2</sup> He said: <sup>3</sup> "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' <sup>4</sup> That day-- may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. <sup>5</sup> May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a*

*cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. <sup>6</sup> That night-- may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. <sup>7</sup> May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it. <sup>8</sup> May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. <sup>9</sup> May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, <sup>10</sup> for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes. <sup>11</sup> "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?*

**Job 10:1-3** - *"I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. <sup>2</sup> I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. <sup>3</sup> Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?*

Look at Job. He does not understand why he is suffering, so he pours out every thought and emotion to God – his depression, his anger, and his confusion.

*Michael Card - Lament keeps the door open, keeps Job on the dance floor with God till the music is over, until the two tunes are resolved.*

And as we will see at the end, despite Job's strong words and accusations, God never charges him with sinning in the words he speaks.

### Ask boldly

Job is in so much pain that he essentially only has two requests of God: either kill me or give me an audience with you so that I can plead my case and understand why you have allowed me to suffer.

**Job 6:8-10** - *"Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, <sup>9</sup> that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! <sup>10</sup> Then I would still have this consolation-- my joy in unrelenting pain-- that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.*

**Job 7:17-21** *"What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, <sup>18</sup> that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? <sup>19</sup> Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? <sup>20</sup> If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? <sup>21</sup> Why do you not*

*pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more."*

**Job 23:2-5** *"Even today my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. <sup>3</sup> If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! <sup>4</sup> I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. <sup>5</sup> I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say.*

Part of lament is not just complaining, but asking of God what it is that we need from Him. Show up! Act! Vindicate me! Bring justice! Be true to your character!

### Trust in God

Despite Job's tremendous despair, he never turns away from God. But it takes God answering Job before he can truly come to some understanding. What is he told, and how does it help us to trust in God in our suffering?

#### 1) Your perspective is limited

In Job 38, God answers Job:

**Job 38:1-13** - *Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: <sup>2</sup> "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. <sup>4</sup> "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. <sup>5</sup> Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? <sup>6</sup> On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- <sup>7</sup> while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? <sup>8</sup> "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, <sup>9</sup> when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, <sup>10</sup> when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, <sup>11</sup> when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'? <sup>12</sup> "Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, <sup>13</sup> that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?*

God continues to give examples from nature and history to essentially communicate to Job that his limited perspective will never be able to understand what is going on, nor will he ever be fully satisfied. Basically: Job, you are not God. You do not have the wisdom or understanding to grasp what is going on. You're just going to have to trust in the one whose perspective is perfect.

Peter Kreeft – *“Job is a mystery. A mystery satisfies something in us, but not our reason. The rationalist is repelled by Job, as Job’s three rationalist friends were repelled by Job. But something deeper in us is satisfied by Job, and is nourished.”*

It’s clichéd to talk about God working in mysterious ways, but it is true. Can you accept your limited understanding? I see the ads for “**Master Class**,” for people like Neil DeGrasse Tyson. Even the smartest human is like a child in his understanding before a holy, omniscient, omnipotent God.

Brennan Manning, in the Ragamuffin Gospel, shares this story: *“The story goes that Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the world’s greatest theologian, toward the end of his life suddenly stopped writing. When his secretary complained that his work was unfinished, Thomas replied: “Brother Reginald, when I was at prayer a few months ago, I experienced something of the reality of Jesus Christ. That day, I lost all appetite for writing. In fact, all I have ever written about Christ seems now to me to be like straw.”*

Can you humble yourself enough to accept this? Can you believe that if God is big enough to create everything, then he is big enough to have a reason for allowing your suffering that you can not understand? Can that help you to trust, knowing that God is perfect in His love, justice, and sovereignty, sees the end from the beginning, and knows what He is doing, even when we can’t comprehend it?

**Isaiah 55:8-9** For **my thoughts are not your thoughts**, neither **are your** ways **my** ways," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Elisabeth Elliot, who lost two husbands amidst many other inexplicable troubles, learned to trust God no matter what, and put it this way:

*God is God. If He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere but in His will, and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to.*

All Job can see is what he has lost. How is he to know that his story will be an inspiration for people throughout the last few millennia of walking faithfully through suffering?

In the end, after hearing God’s answer, this is how the final exchange goes:

**Job 42:1-9** - Then Job replied to the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup> You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. <sup>4</sup> "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' <sup>5</sup> My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. <sup>6</sup> Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." <sup>7</sup> After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. <sup>8</sup> So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." <sup>9</sup> So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

Job doesn't repent of his sin, for he has done nothing wrong, but he retracts his lack of understanding and his demands. He recognizes that he doesn't know what he is talking about.

What else do we learn about how to trust in God through suffering from this book?

## 2) Suffering reveals the genuineness of our faith

What is the backstory?

**Job 1:6-12** - One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." <sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." <sup>9</sup> "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. <sup>10</sup> "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." <sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Satan's accusation is actually very insightful. He argues that the only reason anyone loves God is because of the rewards they get. Take away the rewards, and everyone will leave you.

It's a great test. Take away the rewards and you'll see if someone loves you or is using you. You get married for better or for worse, but you don't truly know if you love until you go through the "worse." Suffering tests the genuineness of a commitment:

***1 Peter 1:3-9** - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that your faith-- of **greater worth** than **gold**, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Suffering proves whether or not your faith is genuine, whether you have a true relationship with God, or whether you are only in it for what you get out of it.

A major part of the book focuses on Job's friends and the advice they give to Job. Remember that they spent the first week sitting in silence with Job. They would have been wise to continue to keep their mouth shut. Job's friends follow what is known as "Torah Obedience," the belief that if you obey God's law, the Torah, you will be blessed and rewarded. If you are suffering, you must be doing something wrong.

***Job 4:7-8** - Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? <sup>8</sup> As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.*

***Job 5:17** - "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.*



But as we find out in this book, that's not always the case. There is not always a formula to faith or to suffering. And if you're obeying because you want the blessings, then it's not really a relationship of love but one where you are using God to get what you really want.

Suffering proves the genuineness of our faith, whether you are in this because you love God and want more of Him, or whether you are in it because of what you can get from God. And that makes such a big difference to how we handle our suffering. As Tim Keller put it:

*“If your ultimate love and joy is found in the treasures of this world, then suffering will rob you of your joy and make you sadder and madder. But if your ultimate love and joy is found in God, then suffering will drive you deeper into the source of that joy.”*

In the end, Job continues to hold on to God even though he doesn't receive a satisfactory answer for why he has suffered. He never really receives an answer. He receives God. And apparently that is enough for him.

Is God enough for you?

### 3) When we trust God, He uses all of Satan's schemes for our good and His glory

Satan sought to discredit Job, and in the end established Job's legacy forever, and proved that the righteous love God for God and not for what He can give them. God does not cause evil, but he allows evil and suffering to happen. However, we learn from Job that if we trust Him, He will use that suffering for our good and for the good of others. **God gives Satan just enough rope to hang himself**, so to speak.

**Genesis 50:20** - *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

**Romans 8:28-29** - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

God is always working for good, even when we don't understand it.

#### 4) We trust God because of the one to whom Job points

In the end, we learn to trust God not because of Job's example but because of the one to whom Job points, the true and better Job. Throughout Job, we see glimpses of the gospel, the good news of Jesus:

**Job 16:16-21** - *My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes; <sup>17</sup> yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure. <sup>18</sup> "O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! <sup>19</sup> Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. <sup>20</sup> My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; <sup>21</sup> on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend.*

Somehow he knew there was an advocate on high who would plead with God for him. And he also knew there was a redeemer, that even if he were to die, he would see the Lord:

**Job 19:25-27** - *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. <sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; <sup>27</sup> I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

For many of us, the picture of God in Job is not easy, for He does not operate as we would. But Job points us to the real reason we can trust God: Jesus. Jesus is the advocate, the redeemer, who came down from heaven to die for us. Job may have lost a lot, but Jesus gave it all up willingly to come down and suffer for us. Job felt forsaken by God, but Jesus was forsaken by God on the cross, so that we could know that God is always with us and that we will be with Him forever, where there is no more suffering or pain or death. And in the end, Job intercedes for and saves his friends, but Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for us, praying for us as our heavenly advocate, that we be seen as righteous and that we might have the power we need to stay faithful to God.

**Romans 8:31-35** - *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*

We know our faith is genuine if we are willing to love and follow God even when we seem to be getting nothing out of it. Jesus is the only innocent one who obeyed God even when it cost Him His life and resulted in separation from the Father so that we might be saved. Job said:

***Job 13:15 - Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.***

But Jesus actually obeyed even though God would slay Him, as He died for our sins. Why can we trust? Because of Jesus, the one to whom Job points. He gave His all for us out of His great love for us, so that we can trust Him with our lives.