

When God
When God is Unresponsive
Job

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HDBC

God is often unpredictable. He is consistent with His word and will do what He promise. But when it comes to how He might respond to a particular situation is often hard to predict. We often set ourselves up for disappointment when we assume to know exactly what God is going to do in a given situation.

You asked God for a certain thing and His response was not what you were expecting. Maybe He said **no** when you expected a yes. Or maybe He acted in a way that was a complete surprise. What do you do when God acts in unpredictable and unsatisfying ways?

For example, what do you do . . .

When God is silent. When God says no. Or what about . . .

When God is unresponsive.

There was a man who experienced an excruciatingly painful season of life. He had no idea why it was happening. He begged God to explain it to him. He pleaded with God for clarity. He even challenged God to come down for a face-to-face meeting to talk about it. And what did God do? Absolutely nothing. He was **unresponsive**, . . . for a long, long time. His name was Job and his story is legendary. He has an entire book of the Bible named after him.

The book that bears his name reveals his story. **It is a story of personal tragedy, faithful tenacity, and ultimate redemption.** It deals with the place of suffering in human life and more specifically the suffering of the innocent. So, it is very relevant to our day. The innocent still suffer horribly. No one is really innocent. What I really mean is the suffering that comes upon a person because of no fault of their own. They did not cause the suffering. That was the case with Job.

His story also deals with the unresponsiveness of God. In Job's story we have a clear illustration of a situation where a godly man cried out to God for answers,

and God remained silent, unresponsive, seemingly indifferent. So, if you've ever felt that God was not responding, pay attention to Job's story.

Read Job 1 (this is one of forty-two chapters)

We can summarize Job's story under four headings.

1. Job's Suffering

We are introduced to Job in chapter one. It's important to understand who he was and what his relationship with God was. Here are some things revealed.

He was spiritually strong.

In the very first verse we learn that Job was a godly man. Four words or phrases are used to describe his spiritual condition. Blameless, upright, fearing God, turning away from evil. He was a righteous man who loved God.

He was financially wealthy (3)

He had livestock, land, servants and money. He had all that he needed, and more. No one in the land could match his wealth.

He was blessed with a large family (2, 4-5)

He had seven sons and three daughters. The boys would regularly host gatherings with their siblings and families. **So far, so good. And then disaster struck . . . in a massive way!**

Without warning this man who was the epitome of integrity and righteousness was **buried under and avalanche of pain and suffering**. With no announcement, disaster thundered down upon him. He woke up one day expecting it to be just like all the ones before it. He would soon learn that it was anything but normal. Before the sun would set that day, he would . . .

Hear that raiders had stolen his donkeys and killed his servants.

Hear that his sheep and their keepers had died in a strange fire.

Hear that raiders had stolen his camels and killed their keepers.

Hear that all of his kids were killed in a deadly tornado.

All that in one day. In fact, he received the news of all four things in a matter of minutes. You talk about the kind of news that could take your breath away!

Watch how Job responded to God. (20-22)

He worshipped God saying . . .

I came into this world with nothing, and I will leave with nothing. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Through all of this he did not blame God. Wow! What incredible faith. But that is not all. You would think that kind of response by Job would move the heart of God to protect him from any further hurt. You would think God would scoop him up in His arms and keep any further harm from coming to him. That was not the case. There was more suffering to come.

In addition to those devastating losses, **Job would soon lose his health.** He was soon covered from head to toe with painful sores. It was so bad that his wife told him to curse God and die. Yet, in all of this Job did not sin against God. Once again, we would think God would certainly come to Job's rescue.

2. God's Silence

The next thirty-five chapters relate the story of Job's constant search for understanding. He just knew there had to be a reason for his suffering.

He looked inward (his own life) for the answers. Could this be the result of personal sin? Sometimes we suffer because of our own sinful actions. Job understood this. And so, he examined his heart. He opened every door and examined all the dark crevices of his life. But he found nothing that could explain why God would have brought such calamity into his life.

He looked outward. Job had three friends who came to comfort and help. When they arrived, they spent seven days just sitting with Job, not saying anything. Eventually they began to offer possible explanations. They meant well, but they were ineffective. Job found no answers in their counsel.

He looked upward (to God) for the answers. Time and time again during the span of those thirty-five chapters Job cried out to God for answers. But God was silent. He was **unresponsive** to Job's pleas. Not only did He not offer a clear explanation, He offered nothing. It was as if He were preoccupied with other things and had no time for His faithful servant. That silence led to . . .

3. Job's Frustration

If you carefully read those thirty-five chapters you will easily perceive the frustration of Job. He was frustrated with his life, with his friends and with God. Frustrated with his friends because they seemed to focus primarily on some hidden sin in Job's life. Surely he must have done something, they theorized. Job knew that he had not. Job was most frustrated with God. Let me show you a few examples.

Job cursed his birthday and wished he had not been born, or had died. Ch 3.

He wished God would take his life. 6:9. *Would that God were willing to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off.*

Job is ready to die. 17:1 *My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished. The grave is ready for me.*

Job is upset with God. 19:6-7 *God has wronged me and has closed His net around me. I cry "violence!" but I get no answer. I shout for help but there is no justice.*

Job laments that God is **unresponsive**. **23:2-9 (Turn and read this)**

Why was Job so frustrated? Primarily because God was unresponsive. There were things going on that Job did not know about. There were conversations between God and Satan that Job was not privileged to know about. God was proving that a man (or woman) could remain faithful, even in the midst of great suffering. He was using Job to prove that point. Would Job have signed up for it? I doubt it. Yet, God chose to use him in just such a way. And it brought glory and honor to God.

When you are going through suffering and God seems to be unresponsive, you can safely assume there are things going on behind the scenes that you know nothing about. You can also assume that God has allowed your suffering for His glory. But you can also assume that God will ultimately use it for your good.

4. God's Response

Everything changed in chapter thirty-eight. After a long period of silence, God responded. We might think he would have timidly apologized to Job and then explained about his dealings with Satan. We might think that, but this is not what happened. Job had confidently challenged God to a **word duel**, and now, God was taking him up on it. Rather than meekly apologizing to Job, He reminded Job of some things. He did this in a series of questions that Job was helpless to answer.

Check out God's opening remarks in 38:1.

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Who do you think you are?) Now, gird up your loins like a man and I will ask you, and you instruct me. WOW! Job was not expecting that.

What followed in chapters 38-39 was a series of questions, each designed to remind Job of one thing. There is only one who occupies the position and person of God, and Job is not the one. At the end of 77 questions, God gave Job a moment to respond. **Read Job 40:1-5.**

Good answer, Job. Then God jumped right back in with another series of questions and statements. And what was the ultimate result?

Job repented, acknowledging God's power, sovereignty and authority. God chastised Job's friends. God restored blessings to Job. This did not take away his loss, but propelled him into a new future.

Takeaways

1. God is sovereign over suffering

It is not always a direct result of a person's sin.

It is not always a direct result of God's action.

However, it is always under God's sovereign control.

2. God uses suffering to accomplish great purposes

In this case it was to show the faithfulness of Job to Satan.

Job's suffering was instrumental in a spiritual dialogue between God and Satan. Job was being used by God to prove an important point. This was not

an uncaring, callous act by God toward Job, but a demonstration of His sustaining power in Job and of Job's great faith in God. By the way, as far as we know, God never revealed to Job what went on between He and Satan.

3. Being godly does not protect you from suffering

Job was doing everything right when this came upon him. Just because you are doing it right, serving Jesus, active in church, does not mean you will be insulated from suffering. You must avoid the temptation to draw a straight line between suffering and spiritual maturity.

4. Faith and lament can be expressed together

I love this about Job. He expressed great grief and sorrow while also expressing great faith in God. Sprinkled throughout this story are statements of great faith, courage and conviction. But surrounding these affirmations of His faith are many more statements of grief, despair and frustration.

5. Your friends may mean well, yet fail you.

Appreciate them for trying. Forgive them for failing.
Learn from them when you need to minister to others who suffer.
Be careful about the kind of friend you are when others suffer.

6. Waiting for God to respond is hard, but essential.

Give it time. Keep trusting and waiting. You will grow during the waiting.

7. God will sort it out in the end.

The story is painful to read, but much more painful for Job to live. Yet, in the end, God was able and willing to sort it out. Either in this life, or certainly in the next, God will make it good.

When looking at our present and our future our default longing is for happiness.
When looking at our past we see that our greatest growth came from hardship.

God is not a sadistic tyrant who takes delight in our suffering. He is a loving Savior who desires to use even the suffering of this broken world for our good. He used the greatest suffering of all for our good. I'm referring to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. When we look to the cross we are strengthened to wait on God, even when He seems to be unresponsive. He is working!