



Hope, When God Doesn't Make Sense
from the book of Job

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The hymn we often sing asks the question all humanity is asking, “What is our hope in life and death?”¹ *We believe our hope in life and death is Christ alone!* But what does that mean? It means hope is trusting that He will help us in this life and trusting that He will get us to the next life. That’s why, as the Bible says, we “rejoice in hope!” (Romans 12:12).

That sounds great, but sometimes, instead of feeling hopeful, we feel hopeless. When a prayer has yet to be answered. When a miracle has yet to come. When circumstances are getting worse. You may be dealing with health issues. You may be dealing with financial worries. You may be praying for a prodigal who is far from God. You may be dealing with disappointment or depression, grief or loss. And it all feels so hopeless.

So, in times like these, does being a Christian make any difference? The answer is yes!

We have hope because “hope is a Person.”² The Bible calls Him “the God of hope.”³ Hope is not wishful thinking, optimism, or good luck. Hope is a person. And because our hope is in God – a God who is great, a God who is good, and a God who loves us – we can “rejoice” now, “in hope” of the promises to come.

Again, sometimes, life can feel so hopeless and so confusing. So I want to be sensitive to you and what you may be going through, and my hope is that this message will give you hope.

The Bible says, “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:1-3, NAS).

Job is mentioned two other times in the Bible. The prophet Ezekiel mentioned Job, along with Noah and Daniel, complimenting all three as righteous men.⁴ James mentioned Job in the New Testament, and said, “You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (James 5:11, NIV).

Job certainly persevered. If he had written a book about his life, the title would have been “Hanging on to Faith During the Worst Time of My Life.” One scholar described the study of Job as “strenuous,” and said the study of Job is “never finished.”⁵ It’s never finished, because suffering is never finished. That’s why we keep going back to Job for lessons on how to endure and how to hang on to our faith.

We keep going back to Job because we’re just like him. Our faith says God is good, God is sovereign, and God loves us. But when life knocks the breath out of us, our feelings cry out, “Lord, where are You, and why won’t You do something?” Tragedy puts theology to the test. It always does. So the greatest lesson we need to learn from Job is to *trust WHO when you do not*

understand WHY. That's the essence of faith. That's the key to endurance. Trusting God when we do not understand why we are suffering or why He is allowing it.⁶

Job's story includes several truths and lessons we need to learn as we face suffering now or in the future. Hopefully, Job's story will inspire us to hang on to faith when we feel hopeless, when we're confused, and to be honest, when God doesn't make sense.

If Job were here, he would say, "There are several things I learned during the most painful period of my life. I lost my fortune. I lost my family. And I almost lost my faith. Yet, God taught me some valuable lessons." And the first lesson is this – ***God tests us to strengthen our faith, and Satan tempts us and afflicts us to destroy our faith.***⁷

There is an invisible war raging in the heavenly places over the soul of every human being.⁸ We have an enemy who is trying to discourage us, deceive us, and destroy us. And we would be naïve to ignore this reality. Peter said, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, NIV). Job certainly knew what that was like.

Job 1 records an odd conversation between Satan and God. Satan was the Lucifer, the most beautiful angel, who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven.⁹ Yet after roaming about the earth, Satan came into the presence of God. And the Lord asked him, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." Then Satan said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1:7-9, NAS). Satan accused God of blessing and protecting Job, and that if He removed those blessings, Job would curse God. So the Lord said to Satan, "All that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him" (Job 1:12, NAS).

God allowed Satan to test Job. How do we reconcile this with the loving, protecting hand of God? We trust, by faith, that there is a divine purpose in our suffering. Sometimes we suffer because God wants to grow our faith, to teach us trust Him more, or to discipline us and get us back on track. There is a divine purpose in suffering. It's not always obvious or understandable. Yet, there is always a purpose. Remember, God tests us to strengthen our faith, and Satan tempts us and afflicts us to destroy our faith.

If he were here, Job would point to another lesson he learned. ***Life can be euphorically delightful one day and excruciatingly painful the next day.*** This is saying much more than there are good days and bad days. Life can be euphorically delightful one day and excruciatingly painful the next day. Job was incredibly blessed. But in one day, all that changed. This is what Satan did to Job in one day.

A messenger breathlessly ran to tell Job that his herd of donkeys and oxen had been stolen by Sabean nomads, and all the servants killed. Then another messenger came to tell Job that a great fire struck his entire herd of 7,000 sheep, and all the servants killed. Then a third messenger arrived to tell Job that the Chaldeans raided his entire herd of 3,000 camels, and all the servants killed. And then worst of all, a fourth messenger arrived and told Job that a great storm destroyed his house and all ten of his children were killed! All that happened in one day.¹⁰ I cannot imagine the shock and grief Job must have felt.

Not only that, after a second conversation, God allowed Satan to afflict Job physically “with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes” (Job 2:7-8, NIV).

Job knew all too well that life can be euphorically delightful one day and excruciatingly painful the next day.

But if Job were here, he would also remind us of the sovereignty of God. ***Whatever we face in life has first been filtered through the hands of God.*** Job believed that.

We know he believed that because of what he said after tragedy struck. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21, NAS). But Job’s wife said, “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9, NAS). But because he believed whatever he faced had been filtered through the hands of God, Job said, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” And then it says, “In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (Job 2:10, NIV).

Joni Eareckson Tada wrote about this principle. “(God) screens the trials that come to each of us, allowing only those that accomplish his good plan, because he takes no joy in human agony ... In God’s wisdom and love, every trial in a Christian’s life is ordained from eternity past, custom-made for that believer’s eternal good.”¹¹

Job believed that. “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21, NAS).

One hard-fought lesson Job would learn, and his friends would learn, is that ***sin often results in suffering, but not all suffering is the result of sin.***

There are several reasons why we suffer. We suffer the consequences of our sinful, foolish choices. Sometimes, suffering is self-inflicted. Another reason we suffer is because we live in a fallen, broken world. We live in a world filled with disease and illness and our loved ones die. We live in a world filled with sin and corruption and bad things happen to everyone. But there’s another reason. Sometimes, for our good, God allows hardship and suffering.¹² But Job’s friends did not understand that.

When Job’s friends – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar – heard what happened, they came to “sympathize with him and comfort him. 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. 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 2:11-13, NIV).

That’s the kind of friends we want when we’re hurting. Friends who will sit with us, cry with us, and say nothing. Job’s friends did that for seven days. But after seven days, compassion turned into debate. Back and forth, they debated with Job about why he was suffering. They analyzed his situation, critiqued his character, and concluded God would not allow anyone to suffer this much unless they deserved it.

Eliphaz was the oldest and wisest, so he spoke first. “(Job), you have instructed many ... But now (that you’re the one suffering), you are impatient. It touches you, and you are dismayed” (Job 4:3, 5, ESV). Then he asked Job, “Have the innocent ever perished? ... As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:7-8, ESV). He was saying innocent people don’t suffer like this. He was implying that Job must be reaping his own sin.¹³ Eliphaz could only conclude that God would not allow anyone to suffer this much unless they deserved it. He said, “(Job) your wickedness is great ... your sins are endless” (Job 22:5, NIV).

Bildad was the next friend to speak. “Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right?” (Job 8:3, NAS). The answer is no. “When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin” (Job 8:4, NIV). Bildad believed Job’s children got what they deserved. “Job, you must have sinned, or you would not be suffering this way.” “Why are you debating us?” “Why are we stupid in your sight?” (Job 18:3, NIV). Bildad challenged Job to admit his sin.¹⁴

Zophar was next. “For you say, ‘I am clean in God’s eyes’” (Job 11:4, ESV). “But that can’t be Job, or you would not be suffering like this.” “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens ... what can you know?” (Job 11:7-8, NIV). Pointing his finger at Job, Zophar said, “For He knows false men, and He sees iniquity” (Job 11:11, NAS). “Job, God knows what you’ve done. That’s why you’re suffering. If you would just repent, it would all be over.”¹⁵

All three friends concluded that God would not allow anyone to suffer this much unless they deserved it.¹⁶ But that’s not always true. Yes, sin often results in suffering, but not all suffering is the result of sin.

So Job lashed out at his friends and rejected their conclusion. “You smear me with lies, you are worthless physicians, all of you!” (Job 13:4, NIV).¹⁷ “What a help you are!” (Job 26:2, NAS).

During this debate, here are some things Job said. And the lesson for us is that ***it is normal to cry out to God in pain and confusion and ask, “Why?”***

Job cursed the day he was born. “Why did I not die at birth?” (Job 3:11, NAS). He wished his mother had miscarried.¹⁸ “I wish I had been carried from the womb to the tomb” (Job 10:19, NAS).

He could not restrain his grief and his confusion. “I will not keep silent. I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (Job 7:11, NIV). “I will be heard,” Job was saying. “If I have sinned, what have I done to you (Lord)?” (Job 7:20, NIV). “For he crushes me ... and multiplies my wounds ... he will not let me get my breath” (Job 9:17-18, ESV).

Job said, “God is not a mortal like me, so I cannot argue with him or take him to trial” (Job 9:32-33, NLT). “There is no umpire between us” (Job 9:33, NAS). Job was complaining that it wasn’t fair. He cried out to God, “Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?” (Job 13:24, ESV). “I am exhausted ... shriveled ... You’ve torn me ... You’ve shattered me” (Job 16:7-

12, NAS). “My complaint is bitter. His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. If only I knew where to find him ... I would state my case before him” (Job 23:1-4, NIV).

Then in chapters 27-32, in agony, confusion, and anger, Job expressed his disappointment with God.¹⁹ “I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me ... and You turn Your attention against me. You have become cruel to me” (Job 30:1, 20, 21, NAS). There’s the accusation. “Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense (“Here is my signature!”)²⁰ – let the Almighty answer me” (Job 31:35, NIV).

With your circumstances, you may be saying the same thing to God that Job was saying. “God, why did You let this happen?! ... Lord, why won’t You do something?! ... O Lord, why?” We’ve all said those things, and you may be saying them right now.²¹

James Dobson describes what many of us have thought before. “A thousand unanswered questions have been recycling in your mind – most of them beginning with ‘Why?’ You want desperately to trust the Father and believe in his grace and goodness. But deep inside, you’re held captive by a sense of betrayal and abandonment.”²²

We know God is good, yet suffering can cause us to question everything we believe. Job cried out to God for answers. And so do we. It is normal to cry out to God in pain and confusion and ask, “Why?”

After pouring out his heart to God in confusion, and even with accusation, Job learned a humbling lesson. ***It is never appropriate to question the character of God.***

A fourth friend is there. He’s the youngest, and out of respect for the older, wiser men, had been silent. But then Elihu spoke up. “I also will declare my opinion” (Job 32:17, ESV). “Job, listen to my words” (Job 33:1, NIV). “Why do you complain against Him?” (Job 33:13, NAS). “The Almighty can do no wrong” (Job 34:10, NLT). “Job, you’ve forgotten ... How great is God – beyond our understanding!” (Job 36:26, NIV).

The youngest friend was the wisest friend, because he reminded Job that it is never appropriate to question the character of God.

Then God spoke. And if Job were here, he would say this was the greatest lesson of all. ***Trust WHO when you do understand WHY.***

God spoke. Yet, instead of being gentle, His tone was stern. “Brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!” (Job 38:2-5, NIV). “Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its satellites? Do you know the laws of the heavens? ... Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water?” (Job 38:31-32, 34, NIV). The Lord continued, “Brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” (Job 40:6-8, NIV).

Max Lucado writes about God's stern words. "God's questions aren't intended to teach; they are intended to stun. They aren't intended to enlighten; they are intended to awaken. They aren't intended to stir the mind; they are intended to bend the knees."²³

When God spoke, Job realized he had said too much, and he fell before God in humility and said, "I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4, NIV). "I know that you can do all things, no plan of yours can be thwarted ... Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know ... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent" (Job 42:2-6, NIV).

The Bible describes Job as a "blameless and upright" man. His suffering was not because of sin, contrary to what his friends said. But how he handled his suffering led to sin, or at least, caused him to question the character and the justice of God. He realized he said too much. He realized it was never appropriate to question the character of God. And he learned the greatest lesson of all – ***trust WHO when you do not understand WHY.***

Job's story ends in the most incredible way.²⁴ "The Lord restored the fortunes of Job ... and increased all he had twofold ... The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning ... He lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations. And died, an old man and full of days" (Job 42:10, 12, 16-17, NAS).

"And Job lived happily ever after." But the Lord does not promise that to all of us. And that's why, whatever may come, whatever we suffer, whatever our heartache, we must trust WHO when we do not understand WHY.

CONCLUSION

So what issue is on the front of your mind? What problem is throbbing in your heart? If you're suffering, if you're struggling, if you're confused, if your heart is broken, I am so sorry. And my hope is that Job's story will give you hope and help you endure and hold on to your faith.

The Bible describes Job was as "blameless and upright" man. Oh that God would say that of us. In our suffering, in our pain, in our confusion, in our heartache, may we be "blameless and upright" before God.

And when tragedy strikes, may we say what Job said. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:2, NAS). When tragedy strikes us, when the worst happens, may we bless the Lord and worship Him.

And may we hold on to our faith. As Job struggled to reconcile the goodness of God and the grief in his heart, he was honest and poured out his heart to God and he kept fighting to hang on to his faith. Perfectly? No. Yet, tucked in the middle of all the dialogue, one thing Job said is perhaps the most profound statement of faith in the entire Bible. He said, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15, NAS). "Even if God kills me," Job said, "I'm still going to trust Him." As painful and as confusing as this period of his life was, Job hung on to this faith.

And as painful and as confusing as life may be for you, may you hang on to your faith.
How? ***Trust WHO when you do not understand WHY.***

NOTES

¹ “Christ Our Hope in Life and Death,” word and music written by Keith Getty, Matt Boswell, Jordan Kauflin, Matt Merker, Matt Papa, Getty Music Publishing, 2020.

² David Jeremiah, *Hope – An Anchor for Life* (San Diego, CA: Turning Point for God, 2016), page 4.

³ Romans 15:13.

⁴ See Ezekiel 14:14, 20. This confirms Job was a real person, just like Noah and Daniel, and not a fictional character as some suppose.

⁵ Francis I. Andersen, *Job – An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), page 15.

⁶ James wrote about suffering and joy in the same sentence. “Consider it all joy, when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2). Pain in one hand and joy in the other. And because we trust our Father, we can live with pain in one hand and joy in the other. Other verses with joy and suffering in the same sentence include ...

- “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6, NAS).
- “This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17, ESV).
- “The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18, ESV).
- “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28, NAS). Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21).
- Job even said, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him” (Job 13:15, NAS).

⁷ We trust, by faith, that there is a divine purpose in our suffering. Sometimes we suffer because God wants to grow our faith, to teach us trust Him more, or to discipline us and get us back on track. There is a divine purpose in suffering. It’s not always obvious or understandable. Yet, there is always a purpose. James 1 says, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:3-4, NAS). James 1 includes trials meant to grow our faith. The divine purpose of suffering is to conform us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). That we be “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Colossians 1:28, Galatians 4:19). Why does a teacher give a test to her students? Not to trick them and make them fail. A teacher gives a test to reveal what the student knows, so the student will know where they need to grow. That’s why God tests our faith, to show us where we need to grow. Theologian J. I. Packer compared the divine purpose of suffering to a chisel. “God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as his chisel for sculpting our lives” (Joni Eareckson Tada quoting J. I. Packer, *Glorious Intruder* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), page 104).

⁸ In a dramatic ending of Ephesians, Paul warns us about spiritual warfare. “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:10-12, NAS).

⁹ See Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-18. In Luke 10:18, Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

¹⁰ See Job 1:13-19.

¹¹ Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes, *When God Weeps* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), page 56.

¹² See James 1:2-4, Romans 8:28.

¹³ When Job tried to answer, Eliphaz accused him of being arrogant. “Are you the first man who was born?” (Job 15:7, ESV). “Do you listen in on God’s council?” (Job 15:8, NIV).

¹⁴ “Dominion and awe belong to Him” (Job 25:2, NAS). Again, Bildad concluded that God would not allow anyone to suffer this much unless they deserved it.

¹⁵ See Job 11:13-16.

¹⁶ All three friends believed in what is called retribution theology. Which means, if you’re good, you’ll be blessed, and if you’re bad, you’ll be cursed.

¹⁷ “Miserable comforters are you” (Job 16:2, ESV). “How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times you have insulted me” (Job 19:2-3, NAS).

¹⁸ See Job 3:16.

¹⁹ See Job 23:16.

²⁰ See Job 31:35, NAS.

²¹ David certainly did. In several psalms, David cried out to God. “O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble?” (Psalm 10:1, NLT). “O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way?” (Psalm 13:1, NLT). David was not pointing his finger in God’s face but looking up into his father’s eyes like a little boy. Another psalmist, Asaph, asked a similar question. “Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment” (Psalm 74:11, NIV). Do you hear the confusion? “God, why are You standing there with Your hands in Your pockets?”

²² James Dobson, *When God Doesn’t Make Sense* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), page 232.

²³ Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), page 11.

²⁴ The last chapter says the Lord rebuked Job’s friends for burdening Job with the wrong conclusion. “I am angry with you,” the Lord said, “because you have not spoken the truth about Me” (Job 42:7, HCSB). Then the Lord commanded Job’s friends to offer a burnt offering in repentance for their “folly” (Job 42:8).