**Shattered**

*Looking at Suffering through the Eyes of Job*

The book of Job addresses an issue that has plagued human beings for centuries – the question of inexplicable suffering. And while the book of Job doesn’t answer all of our questions, it does give us a framework for our thinking as we go through suffering.

Every good counselor should spend some time in the book of Job, not for a list of answers but to get the big theological framework in place, because people need the sturdy framework of biblical themes as much or more than they need specific answers to their suffering.

God gave us the book of Job so that we can avoid the confusion of a broken heart and a broken theology that will ultimately leave you with a broken relationship with God in the midst of your suffering.

1. **Three Critical Pillars in the Theological Framework of Suffering that You Can See in the Book of Job**
2. **Show Your Counselee that Our Suffering Is Always Shrouded to Some Degree with Mystery - *always!***

According to v. 1, Job was a godly man, blameless, fears God, shuns evil, and yet he ends up suffering incredibly.

So here’s something worth noting about the book of Job. God gave us one of the longest books in the Bible – **42 chapters** – to express the anguish of what a prolonged season of suffering– especially when it makes no sense to us – and there’s no good explanation.

“God has given us 42 chapters in Job. Why? Well, maybe because when the suffering question and the ‘Where is God?’ question and the ‘What kind of God…?’ questions are asked… they cannot be answered on a postcard. If we ask, ‘What kind of God allows this kind of world?’ God gives us a 42 chapter book. Far from saying, ‘The message of Job can be summarized on a postcard or in a tweet,’ God says, ‘Come with me on a journey, a journey that will take time. There is no instant answer… Job cannot be distilled. It is a narrative with a very slow pace and long delays. Why? Because there is no instant working through grief, no quick fix to pain, no message of Job in a nutshell.”

***~ Job – The Wisdom of the Cross***, Christopher Ash, p. 22, Crossway, 2014

The book of job forces us to confront the mystery of suffering – the raw incongruity of it, the awful confusion of it, and the apparent randomness of it. And I said the *apparent* randomness of it because that’s how it appears to us, but that’s not what the Bibles teaches.

We’re confronted with the truth that suffering doesn’t fit the neat, tidy categories we keep trying to put it in. The suffering of this sinful world shatters the formulas that we keep trying to create. But even in the shattering, the human heart is so slow to give up formulas because formulas help us to create the illusion, at least, that we’re in control.

There’s a formula or a little axiom that most of us live by to some degree: Good things happen to good people. And bad things happen to bad people.

- The book of Proverbs is filled with these axioms: Choose the path of life and you’ll be blessed. Choose wisdom and you’ll be blessed. Choose foolishness and you’ll suffer.

- Galatians 6 gives us the sowing and reaping principle that says whatever a man sows that will he also reap!

And so there is some Scriptural support for seeing a direct cause and effect for some suffering but not all because the Bible is much bigger than a simple formula. So when you’re building a theology to live by you better be reading your Bible – ALL of it! Not just some of it.

1. **Some of Our Counselees Are Just Trying Harder to Make the Formula Work!**

Pray harder, claim more promises, rally others to pray with you, fast, give more, serve more, don’t speak in unbelief, rebuke the devil, Etc.

1. **Some of Our Counselees Are Redefining God so that They Don’t Have to be Disappointed in Him**

It’s commendable that they want to hang onto God but the only way they can hang onto Him, without being disappointed in Him, is to redefine Him altogether. That’s what Rabbi Harold Kushner basically did with his best-selling book, ***When Bad Thing Happen to Good People****.*

1. **Some of Our Counselees Have Rejected God Altogether so that They No Longer Have to Wrestle with a Good God in a Broken World of Sin and Suffering**

When you reject God altogether, the tension of how to reconcile a good God with a world of suffering is over!

“In a universe of blind physical genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reasoning to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.”

***River Out of Eden ~ A Darwinian View of Life***, Richard Dawkins, 1996.

But the Bible creates a huge margin for the mystery of God and His ways that are past finding out.

**Romans 11:33-34** “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?’”

**Isaiah 55:8-9** “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are My ways above your ways, and My thoughts above your thoughts.”

1. **Show Your Counselee that Our Suffering is Always Limited and Ordered by a Sovereign Loving God**

**Job 1:12** “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.”

Satan had to get permission to do anything to Job or his family. He has no authority of his own whatsoever! He can’t just do something on a whim.

**Luke 22:31** “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked permission to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail…”

1. **Show Your Counselee that Our Suffering is Always an Opportunity to See Our Own Hearts and to Grow in Glorifying God**

**Job 1:20-22** “20﻿ Then Job arose, ﻿﻿tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he ﻿﻿fell to the ground and worshiped. ﻿21﻿And he said: ﻿‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord ﻿gave, and the Lord has ﻿﻿taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.﻿’ ﻿22﻿ ﻿﻿In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

Right out of the box, Job chose to worship and submit to the sovereignty of God but the book of Job gives us an honest account of this man’s suffering, because as you move through the book of Job you’ll see how he struggles with good days and bad days, as well as right thinking and wrong thinking.

1. **The Book of Job Shows Us Two Very Different Responses to Suffering**
2. **Our Suffering Has the Potential to Crush Us into Faithless Despair**

**Job 2:9** “Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die!’”

Now to her credit, let’s not be too hard on Job’s wife because she just lost 10 children, their entire business, and it’s looking like her husband is going to die or at least will never be able to work again. So her entire world has been turned upside down.

The Bible doesn’t say explicitly, but this kind of response is almost always someone who’s holding to some kind of formula explanation for suffering that says, “Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people, so because something bad just happened to us – and I think we’re good – we’re done with God!” He didn’t hold up His end of the formula.

Now, it is possible that v. 9 is where she started – but is not where she ended. And that should be a source of hope as well as a warning for some of our counselees who are stuck in v. 9, because it doesn’t have to be where they end.

REMEMBER: Satan’s real goal is not to heap suffering on our lives. That’s just a means to an end. What he really wants to do is to cut us off from God, and to rob us of the hope and help that can only be found in holding onto God and trusting God in the dark.

**Psalm 34:18** “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

There’s no shame in having a broken heart. But to compound your broken heart with a broken theology will leave you with a broken relationship with God which is more than most human beings can bear in the midst of suffering!

1. **Our Suffering Has the Potential to Press Us into a New Place of Anguished Trust**

“God gives no reasons why he allowed Satan to bring suffering upon Job… Why not? Francis Anderson is very insightful. ‘It is one of the many excellences of the book that Job is brought to contentment without ever knowing all the facts of his case… God thrusts Job into an experience of dereliction to make it possible for Job to enter into a life of naked faith, to learn to love God for himself alone. God does not seem to give this privilege to many people, for they pay a terrible price of suffering for their discoveries. But part of the discovery is to see the suffering itself as one of God’s most precious gifts… Job does not say in the end, “Now I see it all.” He never sees it all. He sees God (Job 42:5). Perhaps it is better if God never tells any of us the whole of our life-story.”

***Walking with God through Pain and Suffering***, Timothy Keller, pp 282-283, quoting from Francis Anderson, ***Job: An Introduction and Survey*** (Tyndale House Old Testament Commentaries), p. 270

**Job 2:10** “But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

Job understood that both good and adversity come from God, so that nothing comes into our lives that doesn’t come through His hands first. And the book of Job shows us that God doesn’t reject ‘Anguished Trust’ that is still swirling with questions and pain!

In fact, the N.T. writer in James ch. 5 lifts up job as an example of how to persevere in the midst of suffering. And he didn’t consider Job a failure even though his faith was not the robust, happy kind.

**James 5:11** *New Living* “We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord’s plan *[and notice – it was the Lord’s plan - it wasn’t chaos and it wasn’t meaningless.]* finally ended in good, for He is full of tenderness and mercy.”

1. **Anguished Trust Can Start by Wishing You Weren’t Where You Are**

**Job 3:3-4,11-13** “May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born.’ That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine on it…v. 11 Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest.”

Job is saying what lots of us are thinking when suffering really slams into us! He’s saying, “I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to go through this. I wish I had never been born so that I wouldn’t be here now.”

But until you submit to where you are you can’t even begin the process of seeking after God and finding His comfort because you’ll be too busy trying to find a way out of that place!

“God meets us where we are, not where we pretend to be or wish we were. My job is to pay attention to where I am. When I enter my reality (my red-dot truth), He brings His reality, His truth, into mine.”

***Real Church: Does it exist? Can I find it?*** Larry Crabb, p. 137

1. **Anguished Trust is Not Afraid to Tell God Exactly How You Feel**

**Job 7:11-16, 20** “Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul… When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you will frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning… v. 20 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?”

**Pastor Tim Keller** describes a seminary class where the professor was talking about Job, and Job’s honest responses in passages just like this one, and somebody raised their hand and asked:

“Well, what’s the difference between Job’s response of anger toward God and the response of skeptics who see suffering as evidence that God just doesn’t exist? I mean, both are honestly and angrily struggling with God’s presence in the midst of suffering. What makes Job any different?”

The professor wisely answered, “Here’s the difference. In the midst of suffering, the skeptic takes his arguments and complaints and runs away from God. Job takes his arguments and complaints and runs to God.”

1. **Show Your Counselee that When Suffering Strikes It’s Our Choice Where to Run ~ Either To or Away from God**

Job ran to God. And he’s not the only one you see doing this. So many of the Psalms are filled with running to God, even while they complain to Him and struggle to see where He is in the midst of it all. **53** of the **150** Psalms are not happy Psalms but are actually Psalms of lamentation or complaint.

**Personal Lament:** Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142

**Corporate Lament**: Psalms 12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

These are Psalms that express anguished trust in God who seems for the moment to be silent and hiding.