

“Encountering God: Through Affliction”

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Job 1:20-22

Part 1 of 3, summer focus: We help others follow Jesus when we *worship, grow and influence*.

Encountering God series: What it means to worship God outside the pews.

Sermon journal intro: “*Why do bad things happen to good people?*” is a frequently asked question. We could also ask, “*Why do good things happen to bad people?*” Sometimes we get what we deserve but Job had done nothing wrong and still got smashed by life. Life isn’t always fair. Live long enough, and life goes wrong for every human being (if for no other reason, we all die and those we love, die). There is a LOT of pain in the Bible. But there are also some amazing stories of people meeting and trusting God in the midst of the storms of life. Sometimes we have to reach our lowest point before we realize we must trust One greater than ourselves. Ironically, it’s often at our weakest moments that we encounter God.

In Admiral William McRaven’s little book, Make Your Bed, he describes training to be a Navy Seal. One way drill instructors could irritate recruits was making them do a “Sugar Cookie.” That’s where a recruit ran into the ocean and had to roll around on the sand. Recruits hated it because the sand stayed on them all day. It was very irritating. His drill instructor was “Moki.” One day Moki made McRaven do a Sugar Cookie for no apparent infraction. Afterwards Moki asked if McRaven knew “why” he had made him do a Sugar Cookie. McRaven had no idea. Moki said it wasn’t for any infraction, but just to teach McRaven that **life isn’t fair**. After basic training ended, the two became friends and stayed in touch. Some years later Moki was in an accident which paralyzed him from the waist down. McRaven said he never heard Moki complain that *life isn’t fair*. He just went on. He became a painter, got married, became a dad, and helped organize a marathon. Indeed, “life isn’t fair.” It never has been and it never will be. Complaining about it or making ourselves into a victim is normal, but at some point, it doesn’t help us solve the problem. There will be wonderful things which will happen to us in life. We’ll experience laughter and love and joy. Most of life

will be spent in the everyday routines. We will also experience suffering, tragedy and death.

The greatest people in the Bible illustrate this. They all had great victories and triumphs. They also suffered. **Abraham/Sarah** (infertility), **Moses** (an outcast for 40 years), **David** (numerous attempts on his life, his best friend died, an infant son died, a son raped his half-sister, another son murdered his half-brother, and yet another son rebelled and he died, too) **Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah** (major depression) and **Jesus** (He quoted Psalm 22 on the cross: "*My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?*")

We can't talk about Bible characters who suffered w/o mentioning **Job**. He had a legendary reputation. Job was "*the greatest man among all the people of the east.*" He was a **fabulously wealthy + famous** man. He had a wonderful **family** (7 sons & 3 daughters). Job had a lot of "stuff" but he was also "made of the right stuff," too. His character/integrity was impeccable. He was a man of great **faith**.

Then **Satan**, God's adversary and the accuser of God's people, arrives. He seeks to alienate us from God and generate unbelief. We are affected by the spiritual realm, whether we know it or not. Satan a perplexing character, but it also appears that God bragging on Job is a set-up. God tells 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.**" (1:8) "Why did God do this? The "accuser" indicts both Job and God by saying the only reason Job follows God is because God has blessed him. Then God gives Satan permission to wipe out his fortune and his family (he lost his 10 children). Here's our text.

Job 1:20-22 (pg. 789)

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. (Both are signs of intense mourning.

Then he fell to the ground in worship²¹ 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." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

In chapter **2**, God allows Satan to destroy Job's health. Mrs. Job is furious. Hers is a normal human response: she tells Job to curse God and die. Yet, Job resists her advice.

In chapter **3**, **Job vents**. He cursed the day of his birth.

In chapters **4-31**, we meet **Job's friends**. To their credit, they did 3 things right. They came to be with him, they wept (emotionally connected), and they sat quietly with him for 7 days and nights w/o saying a word. They gave sympathy and comfort. Then they tried to identify and solve the problem. They felt Job had done something wrong. His faith/integrity are questioned. Job rejects their advice

and they end up in an argument. Job didn't want to have anything to do with them. They finally shut up in 31.

In chapters **32-37** we meet a 4th fellow named "Elihu." He's not one of the 3 original friends. He has the longest speech of any. He condemns Job's self-righteousness & tells the 3 friends they were wrong. He also defends the Sovereignty of God.

In chapters **38-41** **God speaks** to Job "out of the storm" about His sovereignty. The Lord upholds His sovereignty, wisdom, power, and majesty.

In chapter **42** **Job repents** with utter humility. The story has a "happy ending." Job is restored and was blessed more in the last part of his life than in his first.

Live long enough, and we will have some Job-like experiences. How do **WE** explain affliction?

I can explain certain reasons for suffering – text/drive = you may have an accident. Rob a bank, = you'll eventually get caught. Smoke = you'll increase your odds of cancer. But some things we can't explain. Some who never smoke, watch their diet + exercise still get cancer. "**WHY?**" is often never answered. We can ask the question, but we often never make sense of life. Our enemy, **SATAN**, sows weeds in the wheat field + prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour us. We don't obsess about this, nor ignore the reality that there is spiritual evil in our world. We know we have capacity of evil (**SIN**) within ourselves. We can't always say, "The Devil made me do it." We must own there's something sinful in our wiring: "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." If it's true for US, then it's also true for everyone else. There is a "**WORLDLY**" sense of evil – it's in our culture. So, here are 3 reasons "Why?" bad things happen to others: **Satan** (cosmic evil), **our sin**, + a **sinful culture** ("everyone is doing it"). We will all suffer. We will all die. *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;*

Whether or not I can explain "Why?" I must move to the **HOW?** question. "How do I get through it."

Application:

1) **TRUST GOD**. We must believe that God is Sovereign (otherwise God is not God). God's wisdom is far beyond our own. We must also believe that God is Good, else we'll never trust Him. We can't understand everything He does, but we can count on Him and trust Him. As Christians, we have confidence that "all things will work together for good" because of the Resurrection. This is the unifying theme of all the "great" people of the Bible. They trusted God. Here's how the Apostle Paul saw it:

2 Cor 12:7-10 *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* Paul doesn't brag on his successes, but describes his challenges and afflictions. He's honest. His pain is not relieved. The thorn remains. People of faith are not immune from problems. When we (or people we love) suffer, it is tempting to justify ourselves and blame God. A proper response allows for honest questions asked with humility and reverence, but God wants us to be **faithful** and to trust Him despite our suffering (for whatever reason).

2) **FIND OTHERS.** Job's wife wasn't a great source of strength or wisdom. His friends weren't as bad as she was, but they ultimately weren't helpful. Our family/friends will NOT be perfect. On the other hand, we have the witness of Paul's thorn. We are grateful for his words. Knowing all the great examples of the faith suffered helps us know we're not alone (see Hebrews 11). We can find others to help us, or we can find others who need our help, but we need to stay connected as we Help Others Follow Jesus.

Sometimes bad things happen to good people and vice versa. Our thorns can produce compassion. We understand what it means to be in the fellowship of suffering. Sometimes there is an obvious explanation for problems and sometimes there is not. Sometimes we need to repent and sometimes we need reassurance that we are loved. We need to be on mission to Help Others Follow Jesus, too.

3) **WORSHIP** = the best way to deal with affliction. It moves our eyes off of ourselves and our problems and reminds us of Someone and Something greater! *Most of life is lived in "normal, routine" time. Not high, not low. I think this is when we build our spiritual muscle. It's our everyday decision. Who are we going to follow? Will we be a disciple of Jesus or not? That's why it's so important to come to worship – we set up a routine and a habit that gives us strength. *Worship is about giving. We give our praise and worship to God. Worship is not about what we "get" out of it. It's what we bring to it. It's our time to give ourselves up to God. If we see worship as a transaction – like you pay for a "Happy Meal" then you should get a drink, a burger and some toys – some people think that's what a worship service is about – "Make Me Happy!" Worship is a

time when we give our very best to God. God gets our full and complete attention. We come prepared. We don't focus upon the music or the performance or the preacher or someone's clothes. Worship isn't a time to play on our phones or to judge others. Worship is a time for us to give ourselves to God. We do it in a worship service; but we also do it at other times and other places. Worship can be in we car listening to music or praying. Worship can be when we walk.

*Worship as an act of the will, not of the emotions. A choice we make, not something we feel.

Application? Trust God? Find Others? Worship? Job, a righteous man, repented. Maybe we should, too.