

WHEN GOD DOESN'T GIVE A REASON

THE BOOK OF JOB

In verse 35 Job cries, "Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark. Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my Prosecutor had written a book!"

At a kid's summer camp a counselor was leading a discussion on creation... He explained why God created the clouds, the trees, the rocks, the rivers, the animals. God had a good reason for all He created. That's when one little boy questioned him, "If God has a good purpose for everything... why did He create poison ivy?" His question was followed by dead silence. The counselor didn't know how to answer. Finally another child came to the rescue. He explained to the class, "The reason God made poison ivy is because He wants us to know there are certain things we should keep our cotton-pick'n hands off of..." A good explanation indeed!

I believe when we get to heaven we'll discover every story begun in this life finishes with a happy ending! There is a good reason for everything God does. The problem though is we don't always see His purpose. There are issues in life, *like poison ivy* - that cause great grief... and for no apparent reason. Some situations appear to have no sane, logical explanation. And we wonder, "WHY?" *How do you respond when bad things happen and God gives no reason why?*

As Christians we believe God is sovereign! He does *whatever He likes, whenever He likes, however He likes, to whomever He likes*. He rules the universe - both good and evil - God is "Da Boss!" Read the first chapter in Job, and you'll notice *Satan* can't harm a hair on Job's head without first getting God's permission. Nothing happens in our lives - or universe - that isn't at least permitted by God. Of course, God's sovereignty is a wonderful doctrine when circumstances are pleasant - when life goes well. We're delighted God chooses to bless us! But what's your attitude when life takes a turn for the worse... *and for no apparent reason?*

In my early years as a Christian I had a friend who was a captivating Bible teacher. He had a growing ministry. He was a husband, and a father of five kids. And his life was influencing thousands of people for Jesus (*including my own*). I'll never forget the day I heard on the radio the prop-plane he was flying had slammed into the side of a mountain. The news broke my heart. I can remember crying out, "God why? Look at all he's doing for Your Kingdom? Why this...?"

This is also how I respond when I hear of...

- A tornado that touches down and wipes out a trailer park...
- Or a family on vacation destroyed by a drunk driver...
- Or a virtuous woman raped...
- Or a hemophiliac getting AIDS from a transfusion...
- Or a hard-working husband who gets laid-off and can't feed his family...
- Or a child born severely retarded...
- Or a follower of Jesus diagnosed with cancer...

What happens to *your* faith when you encounter disappointing situations? How do you respond when bad stuff happens to good people – even God’s people - and you see nothing good result? Have you ever *asked why?*... Ever *SCREAMED why?* How do you deal with the poison ivy in your life?

Job dealt with plenty of poison ivy... In the first two chapters of the book we learn how overnight Job lost everything - *his fortune, family, fitness, and friends*. Usually a man in such distress can lean on the comfort of a devoted wife, but Mrs. Job rebuked him, “*Curse God and die.*” She was after the insurance money.

I’m sure you’ve all heard of the *stress factor index*. It’s a set of numerical values that try to quantify the amount of stress produced by certain events... For example, “*The death of a spouse equals 100. The death of a close family member a 63. Fired from a job 47. A pregnancy 40 (for the wife – it’s 100 for the grandpa.) On it goes.*” The experts say 79% of those whose stress factor index hits 300-plus, suffer a major illness as a consequence. When I figured Job’s stress factor index it added up to 650 – twice the danger level. If you think you’ve got problems check out Job!

And here’s the kicker... Job did nothing to deserve what happened to him! Job is vindicated from the outset – 1:1 tells us Job was “*blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil*”. In 2:3 the Lord Himself says... all that happened to Job came upon him “*without a cause*”. Yes, Job was human, and like all humans he was a sinner, but he did nothing specific to warrant his calamity.

If you doubt Job’s devotion to God, look at his initial reaction to his loss in 1:21. He utters, “*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.*” To me, that’s one of the strongest statements of faith in Scripture! Job 1:22 sums up Job’s part in his calamity... “*In all this Job did not sin...*”

In Job 1-2, *WE* are told why all this devastation occurred in Job’s life... Job got in the middle of a cosmic showdown between God and Satan. One day Satan appeared before God, and like a proud papa God mentioned the piety of his servant Job. Satan scoffed, “*Job is so blessed why wouldn’t he serve You? God, you’ve spoiled him. Allow a little hardship, and Job will turn on you in a heartbeat.*” Ironically, rather than Job being punished for an evil deed, his agony was caused by the opposite. God was so proud of Job’s devotion He staked His honor on his reaction. Without knowing it, Job was *the appointed protector of God’s glory!*

Whenever I read the book of Job I’m struck by an often overlooked fact – **Job never read the first two chapters of the book of Job.** *We’re* told why he suffered, *but not Job*. Until the day he died Job never got an explanation for his calamity. God never told Job why... but that didn’t stop his friends from trying to answer the question. For the bulk of the book, chapters 3-31 - three buds: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar – take turns offering their explanation for the cause of Job’s suffering.

I figure they were golfing buddies - a foursome that met every Saturday, and when Job didn't show up one morning they came to check on their friend... When they arrived they found Job in the ash heap, scratching his oozing sores. For seven days they sit in silence, mourning for the friend. As it turns out just sitting there *with* Job - being there *for* Job - was the only benefit they offered. When they open their mouths they torture Job with erroneous counsel. In 16:2, Job tells his friends how much help they were... “*miserable comforters are you all!*”

Job's golfing buddies are like many folks today, who are trapped in a restrictive, defective theology. I like to call it "kindergarten theology." It's the simplistic view – it's the belief, that in this life, sin is always punished, and good is always rewarded. Thus, when bad things happen it means the victim must've committed a sin.

As kids our experiences with mommy and daddy seem to confirm our belief. Parents see to it our good deeds are prized and our disobedience is punished. But then we move out into the real world, and discover that's not always how life pans out. Bad things do happen to good people. Bad people often get away with their crimes. Circumstances are not always just. Life isn't always fair.

Being a bit of golfer myself, I've noticed how golfing buddies particularly like to hold to this simplistic, kindergarten theology. When a golfer hits an errant shot into the woods, and it caroms off a tree trunk back into the center of the fairway, he'll laugh and say to his partner, "Well, it looks like I'm living right"... *as if holy living entitles you to favorable breaks - while unholy living leaves you in the rough.* I wish life were always that straightforward... *but it's not.*

This is what Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar refuse to admit. They're adamant. For 29 chapters they scrutinize Job to uncover the smallest chink in his armor on which they can blame his demise. At points in the dialogue they even make up accusations. Job's three friends try every tactic imaginable to *pin a sin* on Job.

Tragically, there're also Christians today who hold to this same faulty theology. Listen to most TV preachers, and you'll hear a kindergarten theology. Do the right thing, and you'll be rich – you'll be healthy and happy – you'll be driving that Lexus in no time. Trust me, Paul and Jan would never invite Job onto their show! I have a friend who suffered from chronic asthma. She was a godly lady – a woman of prayer – yet her Christian friends insisted her suffering was a result of a sin in her life. Her friends – like Job's - went to great efforts to *pin a sin* on her.

It reminds of a Peanuts cartoon strip... Snoopy is standing next to his doghouse – it's been burned to the ground by a fire. He's sobbing, "I've lost my pool, my Van Gogh, all my keepsakes." Lucy approaches him and snaps at him, "I can tell you why your house burned down... YOU SINNED!" Snoopy responds with one of the best theological answers ever uttered – he sounds like Job... he answers, "Pssssssppppppp!"

Here's the problem with this kind of defective theology - it backs you into a corner. When bad stuff happens you only have two options – *either God failed, or you sinned.* That's why Job's friends insist the problem is Job... If it isn't, in their minds, it means God has failed - and they're not about to entertain that possibility. In reality though, neither assertion was true. The real cause of his sufferings was hidden in the heavens. He knows there's a reason, there's got to be another option, he just doesn't see it. *And learning WHY becomes the burning issue in Job's life!*

Once, two Americans traveled to Mexico to open a bungee-jumping operation. As they erected the tower a curious crowd of locals gathered around to watch. Finally, it came time for a test jump. One of the guys dove off the platform, but when he bounced back up his partner noticed he was a little scraped. He gasped, "Oh no, the cord is too long." He tried to grab his friend, but missed him. The second time the guy bounced back up to the platform he was in worse condition. He had bruises and broken ribs. Again his buddy missed him... The third time he rose to the platform he was so badly beaten he was nearly unconscious... This time his sidekick lunged and grabbed him. He asked, "Was the cord

too long?” The partner replied, “No, the cord was just fine, *but what’s a piñata?*”

Sometimes life gets rough. It’ll beat you up – *and you don’t know why*. Or worse, it treats your partner – your spouse, or coworker, or child - like a piñata... And you get no explanation! “He loves the Lord, why did this happen to him?” “She’s such a good person, why her, Lord?” We’ve all asked the questions... Job too was good and godly, but virtue didn’t insulate him from pain.

Remember, it wasn’t Job’s sin that made him a target for hardships - it was his goodness. Don’t be deceived, just because a person is hurting doesn’t mean their sinning – and just because they’re thriving doesn’t mean God is pleased. Guys, it does pay to be good and godly, but payday doesn’t always come in this life. In the here and now calamity can strike even the godliest among us. Difficulties can hit without explanation. Faith doesn’t always get a reason.

Don’t let life back you into a corner. When things go wrong we think there’re only two conclusions - *either God failed... or I’m a failure*. And since none of us are going to blame God, it’s got to be me...and so we beat ourselves up... But remember the story of Job, when bad stuff happens it doesn’t mean God has failed - nor that I’m a failure. There could be a reason hidden from view... Heaven knows the whole story... and God is expecting you to trust Him.

And this is why our responses on Earth matter! In a mysterious way, unknown to us, God’s reputation may be hanging on the way you handle a hassle, or hardship, or hindrance. God’s honor in heaven – *His glory* - may be riding on your reaction to the twists and turns life throws at you. To me, the message of Job is the most practical in all the Bible. It ups the ante on everything that happens in my life. My every reaction becomes strategic. Every eye in heaven may be fixed on you to see how you handle the illness... or lie told about you... or law suit filed against you... Will you *fold* or be *faithful*? This book teaches us a vital lesson - *the stress in my life may just be a test of my faith*.

Listen, Satan has accused God of stacking the deck – *of buying our devotion with His blessing*. He assumes that God is nothing more to us than a meal ticket. And he’s thrown down the gauntlet. He’s told God, “Nix their blessing, and they’ll stop their devotion.” *Do you realize, God may’ve chosen you to prove otherwise?*

God’s character may be on the line in heaven, and your response to a difficulty is the very thing that wins the day. The stakes may be a lot higher than you realize! *The one certainty is that our reactions do matter*.

I have no doubt Job would’ve gladly suffered for God if he’d just been told the effect his faithfulness was having in heaven. But Job never even got a hint. Understand, his greatest grief was not caused by his material losses, or the boils on his body. *Job’s most excruciating pain was not knowing why!* I’ve found that the best pain reliever by far is not Advil, or Tylenol 3, or Demerol - *it’s an explanation*. If there’s a good reason behind our suffering then we’ll rise to the occasion, but how do you respond when God refuses to give you a reason?

It’s like going to the doctor to get a shot... I don’t like shots - but if I’m told the reason for the shot I can accept it, and endure it, and even be thankful for it! But what if I’m given a series of shots without being told the reason they’re being given? Trust me, I won’t be as tolerant! In fact, I’ll get downright ugly and upset. I’ll pound my fist down on the counter and demand to know why. And that’s what Job begins to do! He pounds his fist. Over the course of his dialogue with his three friends Job demands more and more to know why?

In 7:11, Job even grows bitter. He moans, "I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." It's interesting the word "*complain*" occurs more times in the book of Job than any other book in the Bible. Nearly half of the complaints recorded in Scripture fall from the lips of Job. We speak of *the patience of Job*, but the person with the real patience was God! God was the One who put up with Job's spewing bitterness.

Job loses perspective. He forgets who God is - His holiness, His righteousness, His justice. He becomes *bold and brash*. As he questions God - in his estimation - *Job becomes bigger and bigger, while God becomes smaller and smaller*. It's been said, "In asking why, Job loses his way".

By the time we get to our text, 31:35, Job believes God owes him an answer. He demands it in writing, "Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my prosecutor had written a book!" Hey God, You need to print me out a reason! Arrogance has replaced Job's *innocence*. Job becomes so sure of himself he starts to doubt God. At one point in the dialogue Job says to his friends, "If my only two options are I've sinned, or God failed... then God has failed. I certainly haven't sinned." Job, who do you think you are? Job borders on blasphemy!

In his commentary on Job, author Don Baker, makes this point about pain... He writes, "Pain speaks a strange language - it plays funny tricks on us. It makes us think things, say things, even believe things that are not true. When pain bores its way through human flesh and into the human spirit and then just sits there and hurts and hurts... the mind becomes clouded and the brain begins to think strange thoughts like God is dead, He's gone fishing, He doesn't care." Pain was having this kind of effect on Job...

Toward the end of Job's discourses he starts challenging God to speak. He charges God with giving him a raw deal, and accuses God of being unfair. In his attempts to vindicate himself, Job accuses God. Job is more into proving his own innocence than upholding God's justice. Our friend, Job, *cops an attitude*.

Guys, some situations have reasons that will only make sense in heaven. Today, we live a temporal, earthbound existence - and that's why it's wrong for us, from our limited perspective, to question or criticize an eternal God. We're told in Deuteronomy 29:29, "the secret things belong unto the LORD our God..." Never forget one of the first rules in theology, "Where God has placed a period never change it to a question mark!" If God doesn't offer you an explanation, learn to live without one. Don't push it. Ultimatums don't work on God. Trust His wisdom!

Here's the question - *can you trust God even when you can't trace Him?* It's easy to praise God when we see His hand at work! When God's blessings – *even lessons* – are tangible. *But is our faith alive enough to survive in the dark?*

Did you hear about the four passengers on a train from Atlanta to Philadelphia? All four riders were seated in the same compartment... An Atlanta Braves fan, a Philadelphia Phillies fan, a gorgeous young woman, and an elderly lady... Everyone was cordial, until the train passed through a dark tunnel... Suddenly there was a *loud kiss*... followed by an equally *loud slap*! When the train exited the tunnel each passenger sat quietly... trying to interpret what the noises meant. The beautiful woman thought, "Isn't that odd. A Philadelphia fan tries to kiss an elderly woman and not me." The elderly lady thought, "That young woman is a good girl with fine morals." The Phillies fan thought, "That Braves fan is

a smart guy; he steals a kiss and I get slapped." While the Braves fan gloated, "Perfect, I kiss the back of my hand, slap a Philadelphia fan - and nobody ever knows!"

Sometimes things happen in the dark. God chooses not to reveal His specific reasons - and if we're not careful we can draw the wrong conclusions. It reminds me of the little boy who was scared of the dark. Late one night his mother asked him to fetch the broom off the back porch. He balked, "But mom, it's dark out there." The mother told him, "Honey, don't worry Jesus is always with you. He's with you wherever you go - even when you're in the dark." The little guy walked to the back door, cracked it open just a fraction, then called out, "Hey Jesus, if you're out there, how about handing me that broom?" God wants us to learn that Jesus is with us even in the dark places!

Hey, how do you react when circumstances occur you don't deserve? Have you grown bitter, even angry? Have you been demanding an explanation? *Is your name Job?*

Let me show you how God finally responds to Job. In chapter 38 God appears to Job, but not to answer his questions. No, God takes a most unusual approach. He comes to Job *asking questions not answering them*. For 5 chapters God asks Job a series of questions he can't possibly answer - a total of 70 unanswerable questions. The Almighty is about to show Job he doesn't know much as he thinks he does. It's time for God to put Job back in his place!

God appears to Job in a whirlwind, and says in verses 2-3, "who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you will answer me." (Pull up boot straps, Job - and answer Me like a man!) God reminds Job that you spell the word God... *G-O-D* not *J-O-B*.

In verse 4 God begins His quiz, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Job has been instructing God how to run the universe - but here God makes it clear He doesn't need Job's help. God was doing fine long before Job... "Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know!" *Was it you, Job, on the other end of the tape? I don't think so!* Throughout the book Job's incessant questioning of God's wisdom implied he could do a better job of running the universe than God... *but could he? Can you?*

On and on the questions continue... God firing queries Job can't answer. It's interesting, as Job questioned God in Job's estimation *he grew larger and larger, and God grew smaller and smaller*. But when the roles were reversed, and God begins to question Job, suddenly in Job's thinking, *it's God who becomes larger and larger, and it's Job that becomes smaller and smaller*.

Hey, Job is getting taken down a notch or two - whittled down to size. Up against God's infinite wisdom, a finite Job knows very little! *What right does he have to question or criticize the Almighty? Who does Job think he is?*

Here's a great quote, "If there is anything a sufferer needs, it is not an explanation, but a fresh, new look at God." We think we need an answer - we'll never be satisfied until we know why - but what we really need is a vision of God. When God appears the reason no longer matters... All that matters is God!

Job thinks he's learned his lesson. Listen to his reply to God in 40:4, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my

mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." At first it may seem as if Job has gotten the message, but not so. Job simply goes from *pounding* to *pouting* – from *beating his fist* to *sticking out his lip*. He's saying, "Okay, God You win. You've made Your point. I'll just shut up and serve you." Job agrees to serve the Lord, but you can bet he'll serve Him with a grudge. Job has accepted God's sovereignty, but he doesn't really like it!

God doesn't want us to **pound** or **pout!** There's a third option... We can **praise** Him for who He is, *come what may!* God wants us to embrace His sovereignty. You can say lovingly... "Lord, Thy will be done." Or you can say begrudgingly, "All right, then, God, have it your way..." Job is doing the latter. He's gives in only because he has no other choice. And *God is not through correcting his attitude...*

Again God comes to Job in the whirlwind, and says to him in 40:7, "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me." God didn't like the first answer he got from Job so He has more questions... God is relentless in His humbling of Job. He's after in Job what he wants in us - not *reluctance* but *repentance*. God wants Job - as well as us - to rejoice in His sovereignty - to worship Him, despite our circumstances. He wants us to realize He not only runs the universe, but He runs our lives - and He's better at it than we are!

This time when Job answers God... he gets it right! We're told in 42:1-6, "Then Job answered the LORD and said: 'I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' 'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'" Job never did learn *WHY*, but he learned something much more valuable. He learned *WHO*. And when you really know *Who*... you don't need to know *why!*

There are people whose chief ambition in getting to heaven is to get answers to their questions - and I'm certain, they'll get their answers. But I'm just as certain that in heaven their answers won't be nearly as important as they think. When we see the beauties and glories of our Lord Jesus, all the perplexities and questions will be overshadowed. In the end, **the Who will swallow up all the whys!**

Following the difficult days of World War 2, King George VI of England made a statement to his countrymen about the uncertainties of the coming New Year... "I said to the man at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may walk safely into the unknown.'... He said to me, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand in the hand of God, and it shall be to you better than the light, and safer than the known.'" *The hand of God... better than the light, and safer than the known!* Some of you are walking into uncertain futures, and you've been questioning God... Don't you think a better approach is to grip His hand a little tighter?

Once an old man was walking with his grandson when he asked the boy, "Son, do you know where you are?" "No Grandpa, I don't." "Son, do you know how far you are from home?" "No sir."..."Well son, its sounds to me like you're lost." The little boy grinned, "Nope grandpa, I can't be lost." Grandpa asked, "Why, are you so sure?" The little guy answered, "I can't be lost, because I'm with you!" That's what God wants us to learn. Even when we don't understand - even with no explanation – you are never lost when you're with God. He can be trusted!

How do you cope with the poison ivy in your life? Here's what Job would tell us... God is sovereign! He's a big God. He takes orders from no one. He does as He pleases without *getting our permission* or *giving us an explanation*. We need to *turn off* our complaints, and our

doubts, and our questions... and *turn on* your worship! God is worthy to be praised! Love God... don't fight Him! Trust God... don't question Him!

Real faith doesn't need to know *why*... when it is certain of *Who*! Always remember, **"What's over my head is still under God's feet!"** God loves you. He's so proud of you He's staked His honor on your reactions. *Imagine... God believes that your response to difficulty will bring Him glory!*