

Suffering and God's Presence

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God is present and in control of our suffering and uses it for good.

MAIN PASSAGES: Job 1:6-12,20-22; 9:14-16,32-35; 42:1-6

Collectively, we have been groping for an answer to why suffering happens and how we are to navigate adversity. The answer that we seek takes focus throughout the chapters of Job. The answer does not come to us from God but rests in God Himself dwelling with us—even in our suffering. Though God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), He chooses to be an immanent presence for us always.



When have you suffered, perhaps even to the point of leading you to doubt God's presence in your life?

Group Time

Point 1: God is in control, even over our suffering (Job 1:6-12,20-22).

⁶ One day the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. ⁷ The LORD asked Satan, “Where have you come from?”

“From roaming through the earth,” Satan answered him, “and walking around on it.”

⁸ Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil.”

⁹ Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ Haven’t you placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

¹² “Very well,” the LORD told Satan, “everything he owns is in your power. However, do not lay a hand on Job himself.” So Satan left the LORD’s presence.

When you suffer, God _____ you. He is well aware of the brokenness of the world, the pain that our sinful choices bring, and how the enemy seeks to wound us. But in all of it, God is still in _____.

²⁰ Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshiped, ²¹ saying: Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.

²² Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything.

What is your typical response to suffering in your life?



Despair

Worship

The pain we face in our suffering is real, and we should be real about it as well. This is what Job did. Even as he maintained his faith in God during his suffering, he wept and mourned. He did not hide his pain or run from it. He lived in it. Pain and faithfulness are not mutually exclusive, but faithfulness in the midst of pain is right.

Point 2: God is present in our suffering, even if it may not feel that way (Job 9:14-16,32-35).

¹⁴ How then can I answer him or choose my arguments against him? ¹⁵ Even if I were in the right, I could not answer. I could only beg my Judge for mercy. ¹⁶ If I summoned him and he answered me, I do not believe he would pay attention to what I said.

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³² For he is not a man like me, that I can answer him, that we can take each other to court. ³³ There is no mediator between us, to lay his hand on both of us. ³⁴ Let him take his rod away from me so his terror will no longer frighten me. ³⁵ Then I would speak and not fear him. But that is not the case; I am on my own.

These verses are part of Job's response to a friend, who said Job must have sinned to be suffering so greatly. But suffering is not simply transactional; it is not always a result of *our* sin. And to view suffering this way diminishes God's authority and goodness.

 How have you seen people treating God as an impersonal dispensary for rewards and discipline?

God Is Immanent: God is not a distant deity who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a _____ God who created people in His image to be in _____ with Him.

 How should God's presence in our lives through Christ and the Holy Spirit impact our experience of suffering?

Voices from the Church

"The inward joy of the righteous cannot be destroyed by outward misfortune, for his communion with God is safe from any change due to circumstances."¹

—Francis I. Anderson

Point 3: God uses our suffering to draw us closer to Him (Job 42:1-6).

¹ Then Job replied to the LORD:

² I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted. ³ You asked, “Who is this who conceals my counsel with ignorance?” Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wondrous for me to know. ⁴ You said, “Listen now, and I will speak. When I question you, you will inform me.” ⁵ I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you. ⁶ Therefore, I reject my words and am sorry for them; I am dust and ashes.

Most of the Book of Job centers on Job’s desire to know why he was suffering, believing there had been a mistake. Answers were what Job wanted most, but when God showed up, He had something far greater in store for Job than answers—He had Himself.

When we suffer, instinctively we cry out for God’s presence. Like everyone, we want relief from our pain, but as our faith grows deeper through life, what we ultimately want and need is a deeper walk with God. We should echo Paul, whose highest goal was to know Christ—even if that path was through suffering, pain, and adversity (Phil. 3:10). Suffering is simultaneously a driving force for and the path to growing closer with Jesus.



How has God used suffering in your life to draw you closer to Jesus?

God used Job’s suffering to draw him closer to Himself, not despite his pain but through his pain. The same is true for us. Jesus has told us that His people will be persecuted, endure hardship, and suffer for His name (Matt. 10:22). And it is this very adversity that will draw us closer to Him as we identify with Him through our suffering (Col. 1:24). There is beauty alongside the pain in our suffering for this reason: It brings us closer to our Savior.

Our response to suffering should be to acknowledge God’s _____ in _____, knowing our suffering identifies us with _____.

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Job 1:1-22

We have all had difficult days, but few of us have had a day like Job's in Job 1. First, word came that his oxen and donkeys were stolen and every servant watching them but one was killed. While that messenger was still reporting on the theft, *another* messenger arrived to tell Job that fire fell from heaven and consumed Job's sheep and the servants watching them. Then while that second messenger was still speaking, *yet another* messenger arrived and reported that Job's camels had been stolen and those servants killed. And then while that third messenger was still speaking, *still another* messenger arrived with the worst news of all—Job's children were all killed when the house they were in collapsed from a powerful wind.

Job's losses were staggering. He lost nearly all he had. But perhaps even more staggering was the pace of the news. Back-to-back-to-back-to-back. In a matter of minutes, Job's world fell apart around him.

As we consider our own suffering, and that of others, we need to remember pain often comes not only from *what* we experience but also from *how* and *when* we experience it. Sometimes *what* normally would not bring us to our knees does because of *how* it happens or *when* it happens. In these times, we need to fight to remember that God is sovereign not only over what we experience but also over how and when as well.



What are some ways you can rest in God's loving control in His timing in your life?

Voices from the Church

"God never allows pain without a purpose in the lives of His children. He never allows Satan, nor circumstances, nor any ill-intending person to afflict us unless He uses that affliction for our good. God never wastes pain. He always causes it to work together for our ultimate good, the good of conforming us more to the likeness of His Son (see Romans 8:28-29)."²

—Jerry Bridges

Day 2: Read Job 2:1-13

After Job's second round of adversity—becoming infected with terrible boils—his wife offered him some troubling counsel. Why was he still holding onto his integrity, she asked. Instead, he should just curse God and die (Job 2:9).

In a book full of questionable wisdom from those around Job, this is perhaps the worst. It is easy for us to see Job's wife almost as a caricature, but we need to resist this. Yes, this was terrible advice, but she deserves grace from us. We cannot forget that Job was not alone in his losses; she experienced them too. Her world collapsed just as much as Job's. Here was a mother who had just lost all of her children. She was grieving too. She was struggling too. She was in pain too.

Sometimes in our pain, we develop myopia. Our suffering is so great that we turn our attention inward and forget that others around us might be hurting as well. The gospel pushes us to resist this. Jesus humbled Himself and suffered greatly, all the while fixing His gaze on the Father's glory and our good. For that reason, we too are to strive to live selflessly always, even in our times of distress.



Who around you is hurting right now? How can you show them God's love, grace, and mercy today?

Day 3: Read Job 9:1-35

Abandonment. This was what Job felt, and it was a sensation that Jesus Christ would express as well, although with a much different understanding. While on the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matt. 27:46). This apparent cry for help came after Jesus had been on the cross for several hours and might seem like a lack of trust. But it is important to know where Jesus drew the statement from: the Book of Psalms. As He hung on the cross, bearing the persecution that He did not deserve, Jesus quoted from Psalm 22. This psalm begins with a cry of desperation but ends with a cry of praise. Jesus knew the suffering He was enduring in that moment would not last, but more importantly, that it would lead to victory.

That first part of Psalm 22 is where Job lived for most of the book bearing his name. But in the end, he too saw how God used his suffering. Victory came through his pain.



What areas of suffering or challenge are you experiencing right now? How might God use these for His glory and your good?

Day 4: Read Job 38:1–40:5

For Job, it was plain. He was suffering, yet he had done no wrong. So there could only be one logical reason for the pain he was experiencing: God had made a mistake. This was why he cried out for a mediator; he wanted to be heard to set the record straight with God—to *set God straight*.

That is, until God started speaking in Job 38. Did Job really think he could argue with God and win? Did he really believe that God was punishing him instead of a neighbor because He had the wrong address? Job was so set on proving his own innocence that he was willing to impugn God's righteousness.

What Job couldn't see in the midst of his suffering was that his pain, on this occasion, was not a form of discipline. God had a greater purpose in it. Our good God is sovereign even over our suffering. So God had not made the mistake; Job had. God had allowed Job to suffer so that even through his suffering, Job might declare the glory of God, just as he had in chapters 1–2: *The Lord gives; the Lord takes. Blessed be the name of the Lord.*



In what ways can you point others to God's glory through your suffering?

Day 5: Read Job 40:6–42:17

Sometimes what is not said in Scripture is just as important as what is said. Take the word *servant*, for example. In the closing chapter of Job, after Job repented, God referred to him as “my servant” four times (42:7-8). If you turn to the opening of the book, you will see God refer to Job twice as His servant in His conversations with Satan (1:8; 2:3). In between? Zero.

Upon noticing this, we are compelled to ask why. The answer is instructive. At the opening of the book, Job is God's servant primarily in his role as family priest. In the end, Job is serving God through restoring Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. But in between these events, Job failed to be God's servant. He failed to use what he was experiencing to push the three others toward God and instead defended himself. Even in times of adversity and suffering, God still desires that we serve Him. Our service to Him is not conditioned on what we experience; it is conditioned on who we are—His children.



In what ways can you serve others this week by pointing them to the gospel?

