

February 17-21, 2025 Edition

Following

The Year^(s) Of [^]Jesus Part 163

What's The Deal With Suffering?

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

February 15/16, 2025



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: We are going to begin a new phase of our Year-Of-Cultivating lesson series this week. We are going to begin looking at weeding out the doubt. When it comes to cultivating our lives to make room for the growth that only God can provide we need to remember to get rid of the weeds that threaten the growth of the fruit of the Spirit.

And we are going to begin this week by looking at the weeds that form in our lives due to suffering. Now suffering in and of itself need not be a weed that threatens our faith. In fact there is something about suffering that makes it uniquely capable of growing our faith in ways nothing else can. It's what we do with suffering- how we talk to ourselves about it, what we do in the midst of it- that determines whether suffering will be a weed or fertilizer to our faith. I think I've mentioned before that in a study of thousands of believers in Jesus who were described as great-men/women-of-faith one thing kept showing up that they all had in common- how they dealt with suffering.

So if we're going to be powerful men/women of faith then we need to learn how Jesus would have us deal with and talk to ourselves and others about suffering. And seeing as how we are all of us in the same storm right now (I do want to point out we are NOT all in the same boat right now- we're all in the same storm but we're all in different boats and some boats are better situated to weather this storm than others just like an ocean liner is going to be better suited to weathering a storm than a leaky row boat but no matter what kind of boat you find yourself in all of us are experiencing this storm and it's bringing different levels of stress and suffering gee how's that for a run on sentence in the midst of parentheses?) I thought it might be a good idea to talk about weathering that storm and the suffering it brings.

So let's talk about the book of Job. Job is the most famous sufferer in the history of the human race. It is the oldest book in the Bible. It may not tell the oldest story in the Bible (Genesis and John chapter 1 both tell older stories) but it was written hundreds of years before Moses sat down and penned the word In-the-beginning-God-created-the-heavens-and-the-earth. I find it interesting that the most ancient book in the Bible deals with one of the most asked questions of humans- why do bad things happen to good people.

It seems to me that Job is horribly misunderstood. I know I misunderstood the point of the book of Job for much of my life. I think the reason is that when we read literature (and that's what this is- whether you believe Job was a real person or not [and I don't have an issue believing he was] this entire book is written in lyrical poetic form) that was written in a culture and world that we would have a tough time recognizing and try to interpret it with our western world view and scientific principles we end up with a much different understanding than what the author intended. So this week we're going to try to understand the book of Job as it would have been understood by the people it was written to (maybe 4,000 years ago?).

With that in mind let's start today by just letting the opening lines of the book of Job wash over us and spend the day thinking about this really good guy who lived such a charmed life:

There once was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless—a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil. He had seven sons and three daughters. He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He also had many servants. He was, in fact, the richest person in that entire area. Job's sons would take turns preparing feasts in their homes, and they would also invite their three sisters to celebrate with them. When these celebrations ended—sometimes after several days—Job would purify his children. He would get up early in the morning and offer a burnt offering for each of them. For Job said to himself, "Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular practice. Job 1:1-5 (NLT)

If you know anything about the book of Job right about here you probably inserted a dun-dun-dunnnnnn (ominous music indicating something sinister is about to happen). We'll get to that tomorrow. Maybe for today spend some time thinking about what you'd think about someone that for all outward appearances seemed to be living a charmed life and then ask yourself what would you think of that person if their life suddenly fell apart? Because poor Job's life is about to get turned upside down.

Tuesday Reflection: So yesterday we began looking at the story of a man named Job. A man that had everything going for him. Happy life, happy wife, happy kids, happy servants and lots of money. The people who lived during this time frame would have automatically assumed that Job was therefore an almost perfect person. Why? Because that's what the almost universal world view of the ancient world was—moralism. The belief that God rewards righteous behavior and that God punishes sinful behavior. And while it is true that when a person makes mainly wise decisions more good flows their direction and less bad stuff comes their way (at least of their own making) and when someone makes mainly foolish decisions then more bad stuff flows in their direction and less good seems to come their way (that's what the entire book of Proverbs is about) Job is going to end up challenging this belief. In fact—Job is going to throw that idea out on its ear.

Why? Because we the readers know that Job is in fact a very righteous person but things are about to start going wrong in his life in spite of that fact. Enter the Devil:

One day the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the Lord, and the Accuser, Satan, came with them. "Where have you come from?" the Lord asked Satan. Satan answered the Lord, "I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that's going on." Then the Lord asked Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil." Satan replied to the Lord, "Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" "All right, you may test him," the Lord said to Satan. "Do whatever you

want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." So Satan left the Lord's presence. Job 1:6-12 (NLT)

I don't know about you but that sounds awfully cold to me. I thought Job was one of the good guys. I thought Job was one of God's favorites. Why would He do this to Job? It seems out of character for a loving Father, doesn't it? And so we start feeling a bit of the cognitive dissonance that the ancient readers would have been feeling. Wait a minute- this isn't the way the world is supposed to work! How could God do such a thing?!?!? But here's the thing- we are both asking the same question (the modern reader and the ancient reader) but for different reasons- or are we?

We can't believe God would do this because... well let's explore that a bit shall we? Why can't we believe God would do such a thing? Is it because we'd never do this to our kids? Maybe but we do it to our kids all the time albeit on a different level. Helicopter parents attempt to prevent anything bad from happening to their kids and it's a noble idea but it produces unforeseen (at least to the helicopter parent) consequences. Turns out kids need to be allowed to fail (to a certain extent at least) or they'll never become mature adults. Turns out kids need to experience pain and failure and yes- even suffering- in order to become mature and powerful adults. And so healthy parents attempt to help their kids and provide just enough support that the kids fail and suffer just enough that they are refined by the suffering (and provided with a really dark sense of humor) without being destroyed by the suffering.

Almost sounds like what God is doing with Job, doesn't it? I know it's a whole other level but God is doing what psychologists would suggest we do with our own kids in a way. Why? Because we all know that the world isn't as simple as moralism would suggest- that if you do the right thing good will always come your way and if you do the wrong thing bad will always come your way. In reality good things happen to bad people all the time and bad things happen to good people all the time and at the same time bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people (that's what the entire book of Ecclesiastes is about).

Confused yet? Yeah, me too. But so were the ancient readers of the book of Job. They DID think the world was as simple and cut and dried and black and white as moralism would suggest. So when bad stuff starts happening to Job (who we know is an overwhelmingly good guy who does overwhelmingly good stuff) they're mystified.

So is Job. I mean the book starts out the way they'd expect it to. Job is a good guy so God is blessing him. Then Satan walks in (which is strange in and of itself, right?) and other than the fact that Satan is walking into the throne room of God the story seems to follow ancient beliefs- God cares about Job and God is in complete control. But then the story takes an unfamiliar twist- God allows Satan to harm Job even though Job hasn't done anything wrong?!?!? That doesn't fit at all, does it? And here we agree with the ancient readers- that just seems wrong (as a friend of mine who recently passed away liked to say [much to my dad's delight]- that's wrongness with a capital "R"! [if you're looking down from heaven Dan I hope this made you smile- I know it made me smile so thanks ;o)

Why would God do that? Tomorrow we'll get into that but for today maybe just spend some time asking yourself why you believe what you believe about the problem of suffering. Where'd you get your suffer-ology or beliefs about why bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.

Wednesday Reflection: So here we are- looking at the book of Job and at the point in the story where it takes a very dark turn. Here's what we know so far: Job is a great guy. In fact he's one of God's favorites. His life is thriving. But Satan comes and accuses Job of only being God's friend because of what God can do/is doing for Job. God doesn't buy it for a second but how to really know for sure? Only by allowing pain and suffering to exist in his life. And truly, that is the only way to know, isn't it? If nothing bad can happen to us if we serve God faithfully then aren't we only in it for what's in it for us?

Let's think about this a bit. Have you ever had a "friend" that it turned out was only your friend because of what they could get out of you? And did you ever wonder if that's the way it was with that friend? And did you ever wonder what would happen if that friend ever stopped getting whatever they were getting from you and you suddenly needed something from them? And did that moment ever come in one of your relationships and that person dropped you like a hot potato and walk away AS SOON AS you stopped providing the service they desired?

How did that make you feel? Probably a very disappointed. Maybe even you felt dehumanized. But in reality it's the person who is the "user" that over time becomes truly dehumanized. We weren't created to "use" anyone else- including God. We were made to be in reciprocal relationships with other humans (and with God). If the only reason we are in a relationship with God is because of what He can do for us then we don't understand what God is offering and we will remain shallow and immature and over time we will become less human because of it. I mean, think about it- have you ever known someone that looked at God mainly as a heavenly sugar daddy? I know nobody would use those words (other than skeptics watching from the outside- they use those words regularly when describing how they see a Christian's relationship with God) but that's exactly how we treat and view God when we superimpose moralism over the promises of the Bible (remember moralism is the belief that God is like Santa- He rewards good boys and girls with presents but gives coal to bad boys and girls).

God isn't interested in that kind of relationship. And I think it's this way of looking at God that is one of the things that keeps outsiders from considering the God of the Bible as the answer to their questions about what this life means. Why? Because if we're not careful we'll sell our Christianity like a product that will solve all problems. We unwittingly sell Jesus as a pill that if taken will mean people won't have any more problems- financial, relational, emotional, and even health issues will all miraculously (or magically) disappear.

But God doesn't promise that. He promises to walk with us through all problems but never promises all our problems will go away. And so when we have struggles we're afraid to talk about those struggles because, well, we're not supposed to have any problems anymore. And if I admit I am struggling then am I suggesting that God isn't enough? Am I admitting that either the Jesus pill failed me or maybe I've failed Jesus? It can destroy

people's faith when the truth is God never promised that. Remember that song from the '70s that went "I beg your pardon- I never promised you a rose garden"? I hear that song playing every time I talk with someone who is mystified that God could let something bad happen to them. But the reality is God never promised that.

In fact if you go back to the beginning what you'll find it that God did offer us a rose garden and we rejected it in favor of the thorns. And it turns out that there is something about suffering that is intrinsic to us maturing as humans. In fact there's something we learn in the midst of suffering that we can't learn any other way. Why? I don't know but I do know that there had to be a similar conversation back at the beginning of creation to the conversation that takes place in the opening pages of the book of Job. Read this and then we'll discuss:

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. Genesis 3:1-7 (NLT)

God puts Adam & Eve in the garden and they live in paradise with no worries and no pain. God's plan is that He can love them and enjoy them forever and that they would learn to love Him and enjoy Him forever. But what is love? Can there be love if the opposite isn't possible? And can they choose love if they don't have the real option of choosing to reject Him and His plan? I imagine (and I'm still working all of this out in my mind so this isn't a smooth and watertight argument- just something that's been running around in my brain) that at some point the conversation with Satan that takes place in the book of Job takes place revolving around Adam & Eve.

How can they love You if You don't give them a chance to reject you? Is it love if love isn't a conscious choice? And so God puts the Tree-Of-The-Knowledge-Of-Good-And-Evil in the middle of the garden. He tells them the fruit on that tree is bad for them. He tells them the day they decide not to trust Him and decide to eat that fruit will be a very bad day for them. But Satan comes along and tells Adam & Eve lies about God. Satan tells them that God doesn't have their best at heart. That God is stingy. That He doesn't really love them. And what happens?

They buy Satan's lies in a heartbeat. If you remember when Satan accuses paints Job as someone who doesn't really love God, God doesn't buy it for a second. It's almost like God has a higher opinion of us than we have of Him. But Adam and Eve buy the lie and reject

God's way and unleash into our world everything needed to cause untold suffering in the lives of people. Why? Because God believes in us. And because God knows that there are things we could never learn apart from suffering.

And so Satan ends up getting the opposite of what he was after. Yes, we suffer. But we also grow. We become so much more through the suffering and I imagine that INFURIATES Satan. Leave it up to God to turn something like suffering into a positive. Sort of like He turned the crucifixion into a resurrection and the salvation of all mankind.

God's like that. So let Him help you through your suffering knowing He will use it to draw you closer to Him and make you stronger and more human than you could have ever become otherwise. I know it. It stinks. But it's the way it is.

Thursday Reflection: Today we're going to continue looking at the lessons we can learn from the book of Job- if we're open to learning them. And I wish the lessons we learn were so concrete that they'd be easy to grasp but probably one of the most important lessons from the book of Job is that something very strange is going on when it comes to suffering. Something profoundly mysterious. At the end of Job chapter 1 where he's lost all he owned and his entire family is gone (with the exception of Mrs. Job) this happens:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Job 1:20-22 (ESV)

Now this is a VERY famous passage of scripture. So many songs have been written around the words, "blessed be the name of the Lord." And it is a beautiful sentiment but I think we often get lost in that beautiful statement of faith and miss what Job said right before that. You know, where he says that the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away? What do you think about that statement? Do you think it's true?

Now before you go running off shouting that Pastor Ed doesn't believe the Bible is true stop for just a second. There's tons of stuff written down in the Bible that isn't really true. I mean forget all the stupid stuff humans are recorded as saying in the Bible- the words of Satan are recorded in the Bible and I'm pretty sure that by definition anything and everything Satan says is false (with just enough truth mixed in to really confuse us). And at the end of this book that we're focusing in on God is going to say this to Job's friends:

I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has. Job 42:7 (NLT)

Just because it's in the Bible doesn't mean it's true. So while you're still thinking that through let me ask you a question- do you think what Job said in that verse we started today out with was "true"? It's an amazing statement of faith that no matter what happens I will say "blessed be the Name of the Lord" but is it true that "the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away"? Did the Lord "take away" what Job had? Not if you're reading the same story I am. Let's review what's happened so far. God was proud of Job. Satan comes to God with an idea. Make Job suffer. The suffering wasn't God's idea. God doesn't

cause the suffering that ensues. God only allows it (remember that one of the great lessons of this book is that God is in control). Philosophers will argue for the rest of eternity as to whether in the act of allowing the suffering God is ultimately the author of that suffering but I think the ancient readers would have stopped and done a double take on Job's words. What do you mean "the Lord has taken away?" That's not what happened.

But Job doesn't know that. Job is still working under the prevailing world view of the day. Job's story will rock the foundations of that view of moralism- that God blesses those who do good and punishes those who do wrong so if your life is going well you're obviously a good person doing good things and if you're life is exploding you're obviously a bad person who has done some pretty evil things. We know that's not what's going on in Job's story. But Job doesn't know that yet. And do you want to know something that blows me away- he never really gets that message. I mean he knows it but he doesn't get confirmation from God. All he'll get from God is that God cares and something deeply mysterious is going on here that Job could not possibly hope to fully understand. God's final message to Job is, trust Me.

And do you know what is maybe the biggest miracle of the book of Job? He does. That's how the book ends (and then there's a prologue we'll take in a couple of days)- with Job basically saying "I still don't understand but I've met the One Who does understand and I believe He cares deeply even when it doesn't feel like it to me and for now that's going to be enough."

The book of Job ends almost where it began (at least in the way Job lives his life). No matter what happens to me I will say, blessed be the Name of the Lord.

We know SO much more than Job did about God and how He works in our lives and how He feels about us. Jesus was a game-changer when it comes to our relationship with our Father in heaven. And yet when we find ourselves in the midst of our deepest pain and misery we often revert back to the ancient world view of moralism and ask the very same questions that Job asks 4,000 years ago. Which is only human. It's not helpful- but it is human. And Jesus gets it. I mean, He felt it in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross even though He knew (and I mean He KNEW) who God is and what God is all about. So cut yourself some slack when you struggle with your emotions during times of suffering. God's not afraid of those emotions. But one thing I think Job would tell all of us is this- even when you're feeling those emotions keep saying the words, no matter what happens I will say, blessed be the Name of the Lord.

Friday Reflection: The second thing Job reminds us is that God cares about us. It may be hard to believe when we are in the midst of intense suffering but the message of Job is very clear- God cares. But at first it doesn't really seem like it, does it? When Job loses his patience and calls God out this is how God begins the conversation:

From out of a storm, the Lord said to Job: Why do you talk so much when you know so little? Now get ready to face me! Can you answer the questions I ask? How did I lay the foundation for the earth? Job 38:1-4 (CEV)

It doesn't exactly sound like a gentle, caring start to a meaningful conversation, does it? It will evolve into exactly that but first God has to establish who is who in this relationship. It sounds accusatory at first though, doesn't it. And that's what I used to think this part of the book of Job was- God coming down and spraying Job in the face with water and saying, "bad Job!" But that's not what Job hears at all. Do you know how I know? Because of Job's reaction to God's words:

Then Job replied to the Lord... "You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I- and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me... I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."
Job 42:1-6 (NLT)

Job isn't frightened or offended by God's "explanation" (really it's not an explanation. If you read everything that God said then you know He never offers an explanation). He's renewed. He says he has a new understanding of God. Before Job's experience of God was impersonal and filled with misunderstandings. But now Job sees a whole new side to God. Why? Because of the second part of God's response to Job. God starts out establishing His credentials and if I had to paraphrase what God says to Job in the first act of His response I'd say that God was telling Job, "Job... I'd love to explain all of this to you but I can't. Because in order for you to understand it you'd have to be able to understand how I created the universe. But these things are beyond you and so is my explanation of why suffering exists in this world." That's pretty much what God tells Job in part one of His response.

Then God moves on to the next phase of His response. This phase always seemed very strange to me. God says things like:

Who waters the desert and takes care of the wild donkey?
Who created the behemoth? The greatest of My creatures?
Who created leviathan?

What does that matter? Who cares who waters the desert and takes care of wild animals. Who cares who made the leviathan and the behemoth? God does. And do you know what those ancient readers would have understood immediately that I missed for so many years? They would have immediately realized that nobody would water the desert. Who would do something so ridiculous? Don't waste water on the desert. Nobody lives there. No point to it. It's an extravagant waste.

And who cares about wild animals? They don't anyone any good. Why take care of them? It's a waste of precious resources. And don't get us started on the leviathan and behemoth. Those were chaos monsters- they terrified the ancient people of the middle east. As far as any humans were concerned the only good leviathan and behemoth were a dead leviathan and behemoth. But God says He loves them. He considers them to be one of His finest works. God says He cares about the wild animals and that He loves seeing the desert bloom after a rain storm. Basically God is telling Job that He loves pizzazz. Not because there's any tangible worth in pizzazz. God loves pizzazz simply for pizzazz' sake.

And Job starts to get a bigger picture of God. A picture that would change Job for the rest of his life. He saw God in a light he had never seen God in before. Suddenly God was different and it impacted Job profoundly. It gave him the ability to move forward from what has to be one of the worst couple of weeks any human has ever had and with this God of pizzazz create a brand new, beautiful life put together from the wreckage and broken pieces of Job's old life.

What's your view of God look like? Is He a big, scary authority figure that you're afraid of? Have you ever thought about God loving pizzazz for pizzazz' sake? Are you like Him? Do you love pizzazz (and all of our definitions of pizzazz will be different but you know what I mean...)? Spend some time today thinking about all the ways you can see that God has put some pizzazz in this world for seemingly no reason at all. And then maybe add some pizzazz to your life today for no reason other than you and God both love pizzazz (and I'll bet you've never seen the word "pizzazz" so many times in such a short space... you're welcome ;o)

Saturday Reflection: In the New Testament in the book of James, James talks to his flock (people who are going through a level of suffering and misery that most of us would have a tough time understanding) and reminds them to remember Job as they go through their tough times. Why? Because I think James would say that to the extent that I perceive Job's lessons... I will have patience (which will get me through whatever I'm going through). I wasn't sure what word to use here. It's not about knowledge or understanding. It's about perceiving or experiencing or incorporating the lessons that God is in control (even if it doesn't look like it) and He truly cares about what I'm going through. And not just that... He will make something absolutely beautiful out of the mess that my life has become:

You have heard about Job's patience, and you know the Lord's purpose for him in the end. You know the Lord is full of mercy and is kind. James 5:10-11 (NLT)

It's God's specialty. Taking the evil that Satan does to God's children in this world and bringing about the exact opposite of what Satan intended. With Job Satan wanted to drive him to reject God and expel Him from his life forever. He wanted Job to be miserable for the rest of his life and never again experience the joy and satisfaction that life with God can bring. And while Job was suffering for a season, that wasn't the end of the story. In the end Job refused to be defined by the suffering he endured and chose instead to be defined by Who God is. A God he now knew in a way he never knew him before. It's like a lump of coal only becomes a diamond through intense pressure. Keep the coal safe and free from intense pressure and it will forever remain a lump of coal good only for heating people's homes and filling up the stockings of naughty boys and girls at Christmas time. But the intense pressure a lump of coal goes through doesn't destroy it. It makes it better.

Same thing with us. And I know what you're thinking... what about when the pressure does destroy us? I used to wonder the same thing. I can remember thinking, "sure... Job had the pieces of his broken life picked up and put back together but what about his kids that died? What about them? Didn't the pressure destroy them?" Not if you believe God. Not if you believe the Bible. There's a verse in Romans that always troubled me:

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed."

Romans 10:11 (NCV)

I hate to say it out loud but I wondered if that was really true. Weren't Job's kids "disappointed" at what the end of their story was? And what about men and women through the ages who have died due to the pressure of suffering and misery? How was that for them not a disappointment? I don't think so any more. In fact, I'd say that Job's kids and any other child of God who does not "survive" (physically speaking) the pressure of intense suffering and pain understand the truth of Romans 10:11 better than anyone who hasn't had the benefit of dying. I know that sounds strange but hear me out. When Job's kids closed their eyes for the last time on this side of eternity and opened them up again for the first time on the other side and saw what was waiting for them... I don't think they were disappointed at all. In fact, I imagine they were grateful to the bandits that sped up their arrival in Heaven.

And Job... I'm sure he missed his kids every single day, but his experience with God changed him completely. I know because of how the story ends. It ends with this very strange epilogue or afterward about Job having more kids and more money than before and then the writer seemingly just tosses this last part in:

So the LORD blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning...
He named his first daughter Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch...
And their father put them into his will along with their brothers. Job 42:12-15 (NLT)

So what? What's the big deal? Turns out it's a HUGE deal and everyone reading it in the ancient world would have been left shocked by this ending. Why? Because the writer of the book of Job lists the names of Job's new daughters and not his sons. That was unheard of in the ancient world. Daughters may be loved by their fathers but they were not useful. They were a drain on resources. And once they were old enough to marry they joined another family and helped that family create a legacy and had no more impact on their family of origin.

But not only does the writer of Job name the girls and not the boys- the names were unheard of in the ancient world. They were frivolous names that didn't mean anything of any importance. Jemimah was a word that meant "little dove". He named her after a bird. Why? Probably just because it made him happy. It was a little bit of pizzazz, right. Another daughter was named Keziah which means, cinnamon. And if you've ever been to the airport and stood there waiting for someone to come in and smelled the cinabons being sold just a few feet away then you know why Job named one of his daughters after it. And then Keren was the name of makeup. It's like Job named his daughters dove, cinnamon and maybelline. Everyone would have thought he was crazy. But that's not the worst of it.

Then he added them to his will. Nobody added their daughters into their will in the ancient world. There was no point to it. It just drained your family of resources and weakened your legacy. But Job does. Why? Because now Job is being gratuitously good and uncontrollably generous and irrationally loving and he's throwing around pizzazz for no reason other than just for pizzazz' sake.

Does that remind you of anybody else from this story?

Job is the story of the triumph, of the redemption, of the self-sacrificial love of God, the Creator who loves pizzazz... And a man who has been refined through suffering and through the care of his creator and now he loves pizzazz as well. It's showing us that in his suffering Job became more like God. He started to care about things that nobody else cared about. In this case his daughters. He became extravagantly good and generous and loving. And in so doing Job proved that God's gamble was a good one. And Job has become a source of encouragement and strength to billions of people who live on different continents, cultures, civilizations, languages... All because Job allowed himself to be refined in the midst of his pain. He allowed God to make a diamond out of the broken dust his life had become.

It is the promise that Satan was dead wrong about old Job. The central question in the Book is, can a human being hold on to God and faith, and life, and love when it does not seem to pay off at all? And what happens when a human being does? Job's faithfulness and suffering was being used by God to vindicate God's whole wild adventure in covenant love. Job's honesty and perseverance have been used now for thousands of years to bless those of us going through unimaginable pain and suffering.

Are you going through what Job went through? Are you living in the land of Uz? A place of unimaginable suffering and pain and misery? If you are the writer of this book hopes you will remember Job. In the book the writer says, "hang on Job, keep going, don't let go, don't give up." The writer wants us to say that not just to Job but to say it to ourselves, to say it to each other, to say it to the people that are all around us who suffer, who anguish, who agonize, who hurt, who question, who don't know, who don't understand, to say to them, "Don't you give up. Don't you let go. You hang on, you keep going, you persevere, because it matters." Your little life, your little suffering matters more than you can imagine. You are part of something cosmic and eternal that you cannot even dream about.

We all will spend time in the Land of Uz. Everybody will suffer. Some in this room are suffering right now. Deep, deep hurt. Why? I don't know why. How long will it last? I don't know how long. Does your response matter? More than you can possibly imagine, more than you can even dream, so don't you let go. Remember that God is in control (even if it doesn't look like it), He cares deeply about what you're going through (even if it doesn't feel like it) and to the extent that you and I can incorporate that experience into our lives we will have a patience we can't begin to understand right now.

So. Don't. Let. Go.