

Encouragement from Job the Sufferer

by Daryl Wingerd

Like twin tsunamis, affliction overtook Job in two crushing waves. First his immense wealth and his ten children were swept away. Then his body was tormented by “loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (2:7). Job’s story spans forty-two chapters in the Bible, but in the first two chapters we can gain great encouragement about the realities that underlie the common human experience called suffering:

1. For the believer, suffering is not necessarily punishment from God.

Job was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (1:1; 1:8; 2:3). Following the first onslaught of loss, through which Job held fast his integrity toward God, the Lord declared that Satan had incited Him against Job, to destroy him “without reason.” There was no great sin in Job’s life. There was no secret failure (though his three friends sought diligently to expose one). Job’s affliction was *not* punishment.



God does chasten His children as a good Father, and He certainly can apply physical or circumstantial pain as a corrective measure if He wishes. If your suffering is the direct and obvious result of your sin, or if there is an evident connection in some other way, then you should respond to God’s correction the same way you would want your children to respond to discipline. But if, like Job, you are suffering for reasons known only to God and not plainly related to some moral failure in your life, you should not be quick to assume or conclude that you are being punished.

2. Suffering comes ultimately from God, not from fate, chance, wicked people, Satan, or the blind forces of nature. It was *God’s* decision, not Satan’s, to make Job the topic of conversation. Furthermore, Job knew from whom his suffering came. He concluded, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (1:21). After the second wave left him scraping painful boils, he corrected his angry wife who wanted him to “curse God and die,” saying, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil [i.e., *from God*]?” (2:10). The rational response, Job knew, was to acknowledge that since God creates and ordains both good and bad (Is. 45:7; Lam. 3:38; Amos 3:6), He is the one who determines the measure in which both are given.

Job’s wife also knew. She tried to incite Job to curse *God*, not Satan (1:9). Satan likewise understood. Because he wanted to see Job afflicted, he said to the Lord, “Stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to Your face” (1:11). And then again, “But stretch out Your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face” (2:4). In

both cases the Lord used Satan to afflict Job the way a man uses an ax to cut down a tree. The unknown author of Job also knew that God was ultimately responsible. In 42:11 he writes about “all the evil that the Lord had brought upon [Job].” When you endure suffering as a believer, you should be comforted to know that its Author is the same God who loves you and who is preserving you to the end.

3. As a believer, you can accept suffering graciously. Following the loss of wealth and children Job confessed, “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.” The author then writes, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (1:21-22). While enduring the “loathsome sores” Job reasoned with his wife, saying, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” And again the author notes, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10). Job responded in faith. He refused to find fault with God.

“But what about the following chapters?” you ask. “Job slipped into a God-blaming, God-judging attitude.” Yes, he did. But remember that he later repented, not for his God-honoring responses in chapters 1-2, but for the prideful, self-pitying, self-justifying complaints recorded in chapters 3-31. Furthermore, the Lord did not let Job get away with his bad attitude, but rather asked, “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it” (40:1-2). When Job returned to his godly senses he said to the Lord, “I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (42:6). One cannot be thinking rightly who charges our good and holy God with any kind of wrong. Job, among many others throughout history, demonstrates that believers *can* resist the temptation to sin in this way, even when God sends painful affliction.

4. Your godly response to suffering demonstrates God’s power. Your suffering is not without purpose. When you endure suffering well, trusting God throughout, remaining joyful even through your tears, and proclaiming His goodness to those who might expect you to wallow in self-pity, God receives honor and glory. He is glorified by the response to suffering that acknowledges Him as good even when the earthly circumstances He has ordained are bad. He is honored by the demonstration of a faith that has no merely human origin, but rather was forged in the depths of your soul by the Holy Spirit—the kind of faith that confesses, even as the blows of sovereign affliction continue to fall, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”