

# Understanding Suffering: Insights from Job

By Marco Scouvert



Where does suffering come from? Doesn't God promise to protect us from suffering? The Book of Job provides divine wisdom meant to help us wrestle with these difficult questions by exploring the moral complexities of one godly man's suffering.

Here are five observations from Job's suffering to instruct us:

**Job was a true believer in God, yet he still suffered.** In Job 1:8, God confessed to Satan that Job was his loyal slave. Additionally, Job's practice of sacrificing for his children's sins implies that he did the same for himself. He was looking to God to forgive his sins in accordance with the sacrifices required of his people at that time. Job was an exemplary child of God, though he experienced nearly unbearable trials.

It is common to hear that Christians are under "protection" from God that exempts us from evil, but this is an old lie from Satan (see 1:10). Jesus and his apostles said that believers will undergo many tribulations on our way to the kingdom of God (John 16:33; Acts 14:23). Such truth protects us from being caught off-guard and destabilized by our difficulties as though something unexpected were happening to us (1 Peter 4:12).

**Job was living a blameless life, yet he still suffered.** The author, along with God himself, describe Job as a blameless man who avoided evil and sought to do what was right before God (1:1, 1:8, 2:3). He may have been the godliest man on the earth (1:8). Even though Job's friends sought to convince him of some wrongdoing, his suffering is never proven to be connected to a lack of faith or personal sin. It is true that sometimes believers undergo affliction as a means of divine correction (cf. Hebrews 12:4-17). But it is false to confidently assert that every time a Christian suffers, it is because that person is failing to obey God or trust him in some specific area.

**Job experienced a wide range of severe suffering.** In a flash and on the same day, his entire business was destroyed, he lost all financial stability, and every one of his ten children was taken away from him. Then he was stricken from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head with painful blisters. Finally, he lost his closest companion as his wife foolishly urged him to curse God.

When we are afflicted, we can sometimes think that we're undergoing a unique kind or degree of suffering. As a result, we are prone to lose hope that we can endure. But 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it." If Job persevered through his trials by God's grace, then so can we!

**Job's suffering ultimately came from God.** At one level, it appears that the weather, disease, and evil men were the source of Job's suffering. At another level, we see that Satan was the source of Job's suffering (1:12; 2:6-7). But at the ultimate level, even behind Satan's activity, God was supremely governing the events of Job's life (1:21; 2:10; 42:11). It was the Lord who put Job into Satan's crosshairs as he boasted about his loyal commitment (1:8; 2:3), and then gave the Devil permission to attack Job, but within limitations that he set (1:12; 2:6).

What should we learn from this? First, Satan has delegated authority from God and can only go as far as he allows him. It is comforting to know that he never operates outside the Lord's decree, but is subject to the King who uses him to fulfill his holy and wise purposes. Second, the Devil can never completely destroy the faith of God's children. Jesus ensures that the candle of our belief is never completely snuffed out (cf. Luke 22:31; John 17:15).

**God designed Job's suffering to reveal more of his glorious character to him.** At the end of his trial, for four chapters (38-41), the Lord made himself known to Job in an awesome way. In response, Job cried out to God, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you" (42:5). Through his afflictions, Job received a fresh revelation of God, which James tells us centered on his compassion and mercy (James 5:11).

In the same way, God desires to glorify himself to the eyes of our hearts by revealing more of himself to us as we suffer. He wants us to experience more of his power in our weakness, his care in our need, his peace in our anxiety, his presence in our loneliness, his fullness in our emptiness, his hope in our despair, his joy in our sorrow, his faithfulness in our doubts, and his wisdom in our confusion. And this is the best thing for us, even when it is a painful process.

*Be still, my soul! When dearest friends depart  
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,  
Then shall you better know his love, his heart,  
Who comes to smooth your sorrow and your fears.  
Be still, my soul! Your Jesus can repay  
From his own fullness all he takes away. (Katharina von Schlegel)*