

Trusting God in Times of Adversity

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Holding Fast Your Integrity

When you squeeze olives in an olive press, what oozes out? Olive oil, of course! Why? Because you pressed olives. You can't get grape juice by pressing olives or olive oil by pressing grapes. What comes out under pressure reveals what we really are. What happens when the pressure is on in our lives? What oozes out? Whatever we are made of.

One of the first things we learn about Job is that he was a man under extreme pressure who experienced unparalleled personal disaster. His responses reveal what he really was.

Day One

No one knows for sure when the book of Job was written or when the events took place. Some believe Job lived at the time of Abraham and that Moses either found or wrote the book. Others think it was written at the time of Solomon or later. Even *where* Job lived is uncertain. But dates, location, and even authorship are not crucial to our understanding of the timeless truths in this book. We need to focus only on Job's character—how he responds to overwhelming circumstances and what he believes about the character of God in the midst of these circumstances.

These are the things that will help us maintain integrity when life's pressures seem impossible to bear.

Read Job 1 today, marking every reference to *God*. You might want to use the color yellow because God is light, or a triangle, which reminds us that God is three in one.

On another sheet of paper, make a list of what you learn about God. You might want to get a spiral notebook to keep the notes you make from your studies. Or you could simply put a triangle in the margin of your Bible and there record anything you learn about God.

Seeking to understand all we can about God is essential when we study the Bible because the Bible is God's written revelation of Himself to us. Be sure to note God's character, ways, and sovereignty over history in general and over Satan, man, and nature in particular.

Day Two

Today read Job 1 again. As you do, mark every reference to *Satan* with a red pitchfork. Although there is no biblical basis for the color red or the pitchfork, it's an image that has stuck with Western culture since the Middle Ages.

The word *Satan* means adversary. As in war, learning in advance all you can about opponents can help you know how they operate and what offensive and defensive countermeasures to make to gain advantages. By the time the New Testament authors composed their writings, the church had a great deal of biblical information about the devil. Consequently, Paul could say that we're not ignorant of his tactics (2 Corinthians 2:11). So list in your notebook all you learn about Satan from this chapter. Be sure to note his character, tactics, and the limits God places on his power.

Day Three

Read Job 1 again today. This time, mark every reference to *Job* (you choose the symbol and color).

Make a list of what you learn about Job—how he is described and what happens to him.

Day Four

Read through Job 1 again and mark the words *sin* and *sinned*. Though the word *sin* does not appear many times, it's central to the message of this book. In fact, the main controversy in Job is the relationship between sin and suffering.

In coming chapters, you will see *iniquity* and *transgression* used as synonyms for *sin*. Mark these words the same way.

Also mark *sons of God*¹ in a distinctive way. Note who is included in this class of creatures.

Make a bookmark with these words and the respective markings for each one. This will help you to be consistent throughout Job and also to remember what key term you're marking and how you will mark each one. Add to this bookmark as you go through Job, and refer to it in your daily study.

Day Five

Perhaps the greatest conflict in Scripture is between God and Satan. Some references outside the book of Job will help us to understand this conflict better.

One of the first things to notice is that “the sons of God” came to present themselves before the Lord with Satan among them. Let’s look at some scriptures that help identify these “sons of God” and explain why Satan is among them. Read Job 38:4-7; Isaiah 14:12-14; and Ezekiel 28:12-17. Then read Genesis 3:1-15 and Revelation 20:2.

Day Six

Make a short outline of this chapter to help you see the flow of events. When we study a book of the Bible, we need to identify the main theme of each chapter. As for historical books and this book of poetic narrative, recording the main events, profound statements from characters, and wonderful truths about God will help you remember what each chapter is about. Record the theme of Job chapter 1 on JOB AT A GLANCE on pages 97–98.

Day Seven

Store in your heart: Job 1:21.

Read and discuss: Job 1; 38:4-7; Isaiah 14:12-14;

Ezekiel 28:12-17.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Discuss Job’s situation at the beginning. What family did he have? What possessions? What was Job’s relationship to God with respect to his family?

What did you learn about Satan and his relationship to God? Where can Satan go? What can he do? What can he not do?

From what you observed, whose adversary is Satan? God’s? Man’s? Explain your answer using Job 1.

Review what Satan did to Job. What did Job lose? How did he lose it?

What do these events teach you about God’s power over man, nature, and Satan? What did you learn about Satan’s power over man and nature? How do they relate?

What does Satan believe about why people obey God? Can you tell from Job’s reaction in these first two chapters whether Satan is right or wrong?

Why does God permit Satan to afflict Job? What is His purpose? How far will He let Satan go? Does God agree or does He disagree with Satan’s accusation that Job’s faith is based on his prosperity?

Describe Job’s relationship to God. How do Job’s actions in this chapter reflect on God’s opinion of Job?

How has what you learned about Satan and God affected your understanding of their relationship to each other? What changes would this make in your attitude toward your circumstances?

What questions come to mind that are not answered in this chapter? (Remember, we have 12 more weeks of study in Job to address questions we don't have answers for now.)

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Although most people have not read the book of Job, many know one thing about the main character because of a common idiom given as a compliment—"He has the patience of Job"—echoing James 5:11. The compliment, however, emphasizes only one of Job's spiritual qualities. Job was not only patient in his circumstances—but also faithful to God and God's revealed truth. The book focuses on *patient faith*, not a bare patience an unbeliever might have. True, he waited for God, but he *waited believing* in a sovereignty that would vindicate him "at the last" (Job 19:25). He did not relax this doctrine for a moment (see Week 7, Day 7).

In spite of the absolutely horrible set of calamities that occurred—the loss of possessions and children—Job did not sin or blame God. How many of us have this kind of faith? How do we react when we lose possessions or family members? Does our relationship to God include patient faith?

We might know how we *should* act and think, based on what God's Word says. But the burning question in circumstances like these remains: "Why? Why, God?" Job never gets an answer. The first two chapters show us the reason Job suffers, but *Job* knows nothing about Satan provoking God into testing his integrity and letting the devil do the afflicting. Job doesn't know that this is God's way of proving to Satan that faith exists independent of worldly prosperity and endures in times of loss. Nor does Job know that God knows he will not fail the tests.

But we must learn a valuable lesson. The book of Job never answers the question, "Why do we suffer?" The way to cope with suffering is not to find out the immediate cause but to find out who God is. A deep, personal knowledge of God, our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer is what we need to handle the stress of suffering. We need a relationship with God that enables us to endure suffering without losing faith, without cursing God, and without blaspheming God's name in actions and words.

We must learn that trials help us grow in faith. James wrote about this radical perspective:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

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