

Why: The Gospel and Suffering

The Gospel, God's Power and Suffering

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THE GOSPEL, GOD'S POWER, AND SUFFERING **Job 38-42**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Job 42, as we come to our last week in this series through Job.

I have had eight brain surgeries over the past eight years. They started when I was 12. The first surgery didn't work at all. The second one fixed the problem for five years until a severe headache led to an emergency third surgery. That surgery left me in indescribable pain I cannot begin to describe, and nine months later I had another one. That one lasted two months. Yet, another emergency surgery led to another and then another within a span of about ten days. Has this been an exhausting journey? Yes, absolutely, but the amazing thing about all of this is that I can actually, truthfully say that I am thankful for my journey. People look at me like I'm crazy when I say that after telling them my story, but I am so thankful I have had to endure this, because I have experienced the sovereignty, intimacy and nearness of our God like most people never experience in their lifetime. I know that the Lord is not bound by space, nearness or farness. From my finite human perspective, I was drawn near to the Lord and He drew near to me with incomprehensible comfort. During each of these brain surgeries, even the ones when I was only 12, there was a peace of mind that I can never describe. Yes, it was painful. Yes, I questioned what was going on, but He gave me the grace to say, 'Lord, your will be done in your perfect timing.'

A family wrote me this last week from North Carolina. Their 25-year-old son has battled cystic fibrosis all of his life. He has been through lengthy, seemingly endless bouts in the hospital. In May of 2008, he received a double lung transplant here at UAB. Then in early August, they had to rush back to UAB because he had a case of severe pneumonia. Their son was in critical condition at UAB when they met a member of Brook Hills who invited them to worship here. It was three days after being admitted to UAB that this family sat in this room for the first time and listened to us begin a series on suffering.

This mom, her husband, and many of their son's friends who had made the trip down, came to the steps that morning to be prayed for and to pray for their son. He now has a tracheotomy and is improving more and more each day, and his mom wrote these words,

I told the Lord when we began this transplant journey that I was not looking forward to it and if this was His design for my son's life then He would have to take me every step of the way. He has been so faithful and we can see His fingerprints on every aspect of this journey. I have learned that God gives me a lantern to carry that provides just enough light for the step I am on; however, my flesh desires a floodlight that will allow me to see far ahead to where God is taking us with this suffering. The desire of my son's heart is for God to be glorified in everything, and our whole family has drawn strength

from seeing him suffer well. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for reminding us to look for God's love, wisdom, mercy and goodness as we walk through this time of suffering.

These represent two of seemingly countless emails that I have received this week from families across this faith family, and the challenge this morning is how to summarize those emails. It would be impossible to go through all of them. I've read through them, the details and the seemingly unimaginable situations. But our goal is to see the storyline here in Job and Scripture, and then after we've done that I want us to reflect together and worship on the storylines represented across this faith family.

And together we are going to celebrate suffering. And yes, I said that correctly, we're going to celebrate suffering because the reality is, in the emails that I have read this week and in the text we're about to look at, we are going to see, and I have seen some of the grandest pictures of God.

This is when God displays His greatness. We've seen this, Job 1 and 2, Job's sufferings and we saw the sovereignty of God in the middle of suffering. Job 3-31, in Job's supposed friends, we saw the sufficiency of God in suffering. Last week we looked at Elihu, chapter 32-37, and saw the purpose of God in suffering. And we come to chapter 38 and God personally confronts Job, and I want us to see the power of God in suffering.

Job 42 is Job's response to God's confrontation, so to speak, from Job 38-41. And then I want you to read with me the passage that's going to be kind of the foundation from which we understand the rest of this section of Job. Job 42:1, I want you to listen to what Job said in response to God. Listen to his words. Job replied to the Lord, *"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 'You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:2-6).

God, we pray that you would help us to understand these words, not only as it relates to Job but as it relates to our lives represented and suffering that is represented. We pray that you would help us by the power of your Spirit and your Word this morning to see a grand picture of your nature and your character in a way that propels us into worship. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Conclusion ...

What we want in our suffering ...

I want us to start with a conclusion that we've actually already seen alluded to at different points in this series and then we're going to unpack how that looks in Job 38-42. The conclusion is this, when we walk through suffering and when we see Job walking through suffering, what we want is an explanation from God. This is what we want when we walk through suffering, we want an explanation from God.

The title of this series is "Why", this is the question that dominates our lives, that dominates much of the book of Job. Why is this happening? Job has done nothing to deserve this, so why is this kind of suffering happening to him? This is what Job's friends tried to answer for over 29 chapters. Here is the answer to why, and they are miserable in their effort. They fail

in their effort and they show us that any attempt, even the best attempt to try to answer this question is ultimately going to fall short because man cannot explain the ways of God perfectly and completely.

Now we saw a little bit of a glimpse into the purpose of God in suffering last week in Elihu's response, but the picture is, we want an explanation of our suffering from God. And you come to Job 38-42, the climax of this book, the end of this book, and what you will not find is an explanation from God. God doesn't give an explanation.

What we receive in our suffering ...

What we want is an explanation from God. Here's what we received though. We receive a revelation of God, and there is a huge difference. You get to the end of this book and what you find is not a theological explanation or justification from God about why this suffering has happened.

You see all kinds of questions throughout the book of Job. What is happening? Where is God when this is happening? Why is this happening? All these questions... What? Where? When? Why? How? But the question that dominates the book of Job, that is the point of the book of Job is none of these questions. It's not what, when, where, why, or how. The question that dominates the book of Job is "Who". Who is the God who is behind all of this? Who is the God that's not just allowing these things to happen, but who is the God that is ordaining these things to happen in Job's life? And that's the question that is answered in Job 38-42. Now, this is huge. This is the whole climax of this book. It's what this book is leading to - to show us who this God is.

Now, if, in our suffering we want stuff to be okay, if our goal is to get our stuff back, if our goal is to have our stuff restored, if our goal is to have the treasures we enjoy in this world back with us, then we will not find this answer satisfying at all. However, if our goal is to know God - if what we want is to know God more than we want our next breath, if that is our longing to know God, then we will find this answer very satisfying. I cannot emphasize how huge this is. It can't be overemphasized.

Most people, in fact I would go so far as to say most Christians walk through suffering and the desire is to just want everything to be okay. I want everything to be fine. I want stuff back. I want treasures that I enjoy in this world back, great treasures, health, loved ones, we want these things back. And as long as that is our goal, we will not find a satisfying answer in the book of Job because we won't find an explanation here.

But when the goal of our lives is God, not the things of God but God Himself, then for the first time, suffering makes sense because suffering is losing all of these things to find deeper and deeper and deeper treasure in God. And as long as that's not our goal then the reality is, don't miss this, we will find ourselves, every single one of us in this room will find ourselves in an empty and endless pursuit of pleasure. But when we find our treasure in God then suffering as a reality in our lives will make glorious sense and suffering will drive us to see who God is and we will find in Him a deeper treasure than we ever could have imagined. It's a huge difference here.

So the question is who's the goal of your life? What is the goal of your life? Is it stuff, even good stuff, great stuff, great treasures in this world or is the goal of your life God? This is what suffering is intended to do, to drive us to see the goal of everything and the satisfaction of our soul is found in one place and that's in God. He is treasure. This is what suffering teaches us, and as a result we don't need the explanation because we want revelation.

The Revelation of God in Suffering ...

What we want most often of our suffering is an explanation from God. What God gives us is a revelation of Himself. That's the whole point of Job 38-42, and so I want us to unpack this revelation. What does Job realize about God? What does God reveal to Job about Himself?

His power is great.

First of all, God reveals to Job that His power is great. Go back to Job 38 with me and we're going to unpack this picture. We've read through different parts of 37 chapters now and we've seen Job asking all kinds of different questions of God. Why is this happening? Where is God when this is happening? He is asking all kinds of questions. I want you to see how God responds to him.

Look at Job 38:1, *"Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm."* So here's God answer. Job's been asking questions, here is God's answer. He said, *"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge"* (Job 38:2)? Did you catch that? Job's been asking questions, God answers and God answers with a what? - with a question. I used to hate when my parents did this. Mom, Dad, let me ask you a question. And the look back and they say, "Son, let me ask you a question." I'm like, no, no, no, no, I'm the one asking the questions not you. So it's frustrating. So Job's been asking questions, God says, question: *"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand"* (Job 38:3-4).

And what starts there in verse 4 and going on to the end of chapter 41 is a list of around 70 different questions that God asks Job. You're struggling with all the questions that you're walking through and suffering and God says, "I've got 70 questions for you!" What is God doing here? What He's doing is He's bringing Job to realization of how little Job knows about who He is. He's bringing Job to understand that He is much greater than Job ever even dreamed or thought of. This is what He does through these questions.

Now what I've tried to do is to put four primary titles that really emphasize who God is in these chapters. Title number one, God is our Creator. This is all over these chapters and especially in Job 38, that's where I want to show it to you. Job 38, what God does is He takes Job on an imaginary walk through the heavens and the earth, and says, "I want you to see all the things everywhere, and I want you to see my greatness in them all as the One who created them all." Look in verse 4, we started it, *"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy"* (Job 38:4-7)? The picture of the land.

Then He goes to the sea, verse 8, *"Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'"* (Job 38:8-11)? Sea and the earth.

Then you get down to verse 19, it talks about light and darkness. We're just going to read some excerpts through here. Verse 19:

What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years! "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle? What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth? Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass? Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen (Job 38:19-30)?

So he talks about rain and snow and frost. Then He talks about the stars in verse 31-33. And you get down to verse 34, it's almost comical here, listen. God says Job, *"can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water"* (Job 38:34)? Did you catch that? *"Job, can you look up and just drench yourself whenever you want? No, no, you can't."* *"Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you"* (Job 38:35)? *"Here we are, the lightning bolts come to you, Job, and say where do you want us to go, Job? No, they don't say that to you, they say that to me."*

Verse 36, *"Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind? Who has the wisdom to count the clouds"* (Job 38:36-37)? *"You ever tried that, Job?"* *"Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together"* (Job 38:37-38)?

This is the picture. What God is doing is he's taking Job on a tour through the mysteries of this earth and He says, *"Job, there are thousands upon thousands upon thousands upon thousands of mysteries on this earth and in the heavens that you have no idea about, and the mystery that you have seen in your life is one of thousands and thousands of such mysteries, and I know about them all and my power reigns over them all. I created them all."* You see this is a humbling picture.

God is our creator, not just our Creator, but He's our Sustainer. You see a shift in verse 39. You go from the inanimate world to the animate world and you have this picture of animals, and not just God as the One who created them but the God who sustains them. Listen to verse 39 in chapter 38. *"Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food"* (Job 38:39-41).

This is the picture, the lions and the birds get their food from, not you, Job, they get their food from me. God is the One who feeds every animal on this planet, not natural selection, supernatural provision. Every animal on this planet is fed by the hand of God, the sustaining hand of God. You get to chapter 39, *"Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended. Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds; they leave and do not return"* (Job 39:1-4). Not only does He bring life into the picture and sustain life, He controls life.

You get down to verse 9, listen to the wild ox picture. *"Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will he stay by your manger at night? Can you hold him to the furrow with a harness?"*

Will he till the valleys behind you? Will you rely on him for his great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to him? Can you trust him to bring in your grain and gather it to your threshing floor" (Job 39:9-12)? "Can you control the wild ox, Job? No."

And then it gets humorous again. God brings in the ostrich to the picture. Check out the ostrich, Job, *"The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork" (Job 39:13). Listen to this description, "She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense" (Job 39:14-17). "Do you see how ridiculously senseless the ostrich is? Do you know why the ostrich doesn't have sense? Because I didn't give the ostrich sense."*

This is the whole picture here. Ever wonder about things in creation which don't make sense? Heather and I were in New Orleans this last week for a couple of days, and we had the kids down there. And we had been to the aquarium before, but they've got a new museum called the Insectarium. You ever heard of that? An Insectarium. In aquarium, you go see fish, but an insectarium is a whole museum devoted to bugs and Caleb was so excited. And so we go into this whole museum, and you want to talk about the why question? God, why so many bugs? I know, I know that some of you are very skilled in your knowledge of bugs and all the effects that are positive in the world as a result of them, but we don't need that many species of ants. We don't need termites like at all, like is there anything positive that comes from millions and millions and millions of termites?

And we're looking at these bugs and say, why? And the whole point is, pointing to the design of God. These are the way they are because God has designed them that way and He sustains them to be that way. "And there are mysteries all over creation Job that you can't even begin to fathom." God is our Creator, He's our Sustainer.

You even go back to – go back to chapter 38, before we move onto the next one. Look at verse 25. This is key. Talk about things that seem useless, listen to this, verse 25, chapter 38, we read it just a second ago, but think about it with me, *"Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water"–listen to this–"to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it" (Job 38:26). Why does it rain where nobody lives? What good is that? Nobody lives there, just let it be dry, don't miss it. We would even ask that question because we actually believe that the order of creation is intended to revolve around us. And the whole picture that Job 38:25 and 26 is giving us is God brings water to the land even though it has no effect on man whatsoever, He simply does it for His good pleasure.*

There are things that God does in all creation that don't revolve around us at all. In fact, the whole point of creation doesn't revolve around us. It doesn't revolve around you or me. God's design and creation revolves around who? - God. It all revolves around Him.

This is huge when you apply that to our suffering, to realize that you or I are not the end game here, we're not the goal here. God is the goal and everything in this universe, everything in our lives revolves not primarily around us, but primarily around God. Now, the good news of the gospel is that God has created us to experience our deepest satisfaction in His glory, but the beauty of what we're seeing here in Job 38 and 39 is that God has created everything not for your glory or my glory but for His glory and this radically affects the way we walk through suffering. It's key to understanding the work of God in suffering. His glory is the end. He is our Creator. He is our Sustainer.

Third, He is our Savior. God pauses in chapter 40 to give Job an opportunity to respond. Job speaks really quickly and God is speaking again. Verse 6, *"The Lord spoke to Job out of the storm,"* chapter 40:6, *"Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me"* (Job 40:7). Verse 8, *"Would you?"—Job—"Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself"* (Job 40:7)? Remember, this is what Job has been doing. He's been impugning, slandering the justice of God, the character of God at different points.

And God says, *"Are you discrediting me, condemning me to justify yourself?" "Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you"* (Job 40:9-14).

You get the picture here. Job has been questioning the moral governance of God in the universe and God looks back at him and says, *"Do you have authority, do you have wisdom, do you have power to govern the universe morally? Are you going to tell the proud man to be low? If you are able to save yourself with your right hand then I'll step back and I'll watch you at work."* And Job has no clue about the justice of God and the moral governance of God.

And what He does in the rest of chapter 40 and chapter 41 is He says, *"Job, if you want to govern the universe with your authority, then let me bring in two creatures for you to take a try at and practice on, so to speak."* The first creature is called a behemoth, literally translated—super beast. The second creature comes in chapter 41, the leviathan, a word that is translated literally—"to twist or to writhe". Most biblical scholars have said that the behemoth is most akin to a hippopotamus and the leviathan is most akin to the crocodile. And the picture is, and it's elaborate, I would encourage you to go back and read chapters 38 through 42 in some point, just in succession at one point this week, just read through it and see this picture all together. But the picture is majestic of these two creatures that are brought out from God as examples, and God says, *"You can't handle either of these, much less everything in all creation."*

You get to chapter 41:10, listen to what He says. He's talking about the leviathan and He says, *"No one is fierce enough to rouse him"* (Job 41:10). And in the second part of verse 10 He says, *"Who then is able to stand against me?"—this is God—"Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me"* (Job 41:10-11). God owns it all, God governs it all, God judges it all and He judges it all rightly. God alone is able to save. *"Job, you can't save. I'll step back if you think you can, but you cannot save."* He is Savior, Creator, Sustainer.

And fourth, God is our friend. Now, this is where I want to be very careful. If we look at all of this then we can almost begin to think that this seems cruel the way God is questioning Job, but that is not the affect it had on Job. We see that in his response in chapter 42, but you'll see it if you even go back to chapter 38:1, you might even circle this. It says in the very beginning, chapter 38:1, it says, *"The Lord answered Job,"* and you might circle that word "Lord", because this is only the second time since chapter 2 that this title for God has been mentioned. Every other time when his friends are talking about God they're saying "God"—"El Elohim", words that emphasize the greatness and the might and the power of God, but the "Lord" – this is the covenant name for God that emphasizes His goodness, not just greatness but also goodness, His love toward His people, His commitment to His people.

And as soon as God begins to address Job we've got this picture of the God who loves Job, the God who is committed to Job, the God who is not an enemy of Job, but God as a friend to Job. And you get to chapter 42:7-9 and you see God refer to Job as His servant, a much more personal term, same term that we saw God refer to Job as in Job 1 and 2. Now He's referring to him again, four times in those few short verses there.

This is a good reminder, I hope a good reminder for us when we walk through suffering, the Creator of all things and the Sustainer of all things and the Savior of the entire world is also our friend. If that does not astound you then you know very, very little about this God.

Praise God, the One who beckons the lightning and the clouds and the snow and the hail. The God who knows where light and darkness live. The God who says to the sea, to the waves, you stop here and don't go any further. The God who gives food to the lion and the birds. The God who created all the intricacies in this earth and in the heavens. That God, is our friend. This is the picture we have here. God speaking kindly to Job. He speaks harshly about Job's friends in chapter 42:7-9, but He speaks kindly to Job. His power is great.

His purpose is guaranteed.

Chapter 42:2, "*I know that you can do all things*" (Job 42:2). That's the picture of His power, great power. Second picture of the revelation of God. His power is great, second, His purpose is guaranteed. This is the second half of chapter 42:2, His purpose is guaranteed—"I know, God, that you can do all things." This is his response. "I see your power and no plan of yours can be thwarted. Your purpose is guaranteed, no plan of yours can be thwarted." This is part of the purpose if not the primary purpose of the book of Job, to show us that God has a purpose in this whole picture.

Now, remember, Job is saying this and he still doesn't know about what happened in Job 1 and 2 when God had this conversation with Satan and gave Satan divine permission to afflict him in these ways. Job still doesn't know about that, but he says, even though I don't see the whole purpose, I know that your purpose can't be thwarted. And the beauty for us, as readers of this book, is we see the whole picture. We see the victory of God in this whole picture, the victory of God through the victory of Job and we see that.

And this is where we come to a truth, that I think encapsulates the whole journey we have seen over the past few weeks, and you got it there in your notes. I want you to think about this with me. This is an awesome truth in the book of Job. Satan's attempts to attack God's people only serve to accomplish God's purpose. Is that not incredible? Think about it with me. We come to the end of this book and not only has Satan done everything that he's done under the divine permission of God, but everything Satan has done has actually served to accomplish the divine purposes of God. Satan has been used to accomplish God's purposes. This is an amazing truth and it's all over Scripture.

We don't have time to turn there. I'm going read there, you might write it down, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Do you remember this? This is Paul talking about a thorn in his flesh. Listen to what he says, listen very carefully, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, "*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of*" (2 Cor. 12:7) – anybody remember? "*A messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'*" (2 Cor. 12:7-9). So listen to what Paul says, "*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Did you catch that?

A messenger of Satan tormenting Paul. What's the result? Paul is stronger, not weaker, he's stronger, and he's boasting in Christ because of Satan's work in him.

Same thing, Acts, chapter 7 and 8. Remember when Steven is stoned in Acts 7? Persecution of the church, breaks out, Steven's stoned, Satan is saying, "Ha, got them, persecuting them. Look at the terror I'm bringing on the church." What happens right after that in Act 8? Churches scatter to Judea and Samaria. Anybody know what they're doing? They are preaching the gospel everywhere they went. Satan attacks the church; God advances the church through Satan. Isn't that great, all these people coming to Christ now. Look at that picture, is that not awesome. Satan's attempts to attack the people of God only serve to advance the purposes of God.

I love Martin Luther. I read his biography just a couple of weeks ago, and he talks about this. Martin Luther and the Reformation facing all kinds of conflict and attacks from papists, Satan's attacks on him, and I want you to listen to how he describes them. Listen to what Martin Luther writes. "For as soon as God's Word becomes known through you," Luther says, "the devil will afflict you and will make a real doctor of you and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God's Word." Did you hear that? Satan, the devil, teaching you to love God's Word. He said, "For I myself, owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing, and frightening me through the devil's raging, that they have actually turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I would have never reached before." I'm a better theologian because of Satan.

You see this? Not only is Satan operating on the divine permission of God, but he is accomplishing the divine purposes of God. This is the cross. It's the gospel. Satan's attempt to attack the Son of God only serves to provide salvation for the sons of men. Praise God. That is an awesome picture. Crucified Son on the cross, enemies nailing Him to the cross, mocking Him, beating Him, scourging Him, spitting upon Him. Satan's heyday, yes, He dies. Three days later He's alive and 2,000 years later you and I are sitting in a room singing praises to God. Take that, devil.

This is the picture here. You can't thwart the purpose of God. I'm not saying this is easy when we're walking through suffering, when we're walking through pain and struggle and hardship, and you can't explain what's going on, but the reality is the purpose of God will be accomplished, His purpose will never fail, never fail. His power is great and His purpose is guaranteed. No plan of yours can be thwarted.

His knowledge is perfect.

Third picture of the revelation of God. His power is great, His purpose is guaranteed. Third, His knowledge is perfect. Job says in chapter 42:3, "*Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know*" (Job 42:3). Picture here, man's knowledge is limited, always limited. God's knowledge is unlimited, always unlimited. Man's knowledge—imperfect. God's knowledge—perfect. Man's knowledge—incomplete. God's knowledge—complete, total.

What this means is, number one, God knows all things comprehensively. This is the whole point of this journey that God has just taken Job on. "Job, there are hundreds of millions of processes going on in the world at this moment, right now, and you are ignorant of 99.9999999% of them; therefore, it doesn't make sense for you to stand where you are and discredit me for my work, much less tell me how my work looks or should look, how I should rule the world. I know all of these things. I know all of these things comprehensively."

And the beauty based on that, don't miss it, He knows all things comprehensively, and second, He knows each of us completely. The God who knows every detail in this world knows every single detail in your life. I want you to let that soak in for a moment. The God who knows exactly when lightning will strike because He tells it to strike. The God who knows exactly when dew will form on a leaf because He tells it to form. The God who knows exactly when this animal will eat because He provides the food. The God who knows where light and darkness dwell, that God knows every single detail that is going on in your life today.

And just as there is nothing in creation that is outside of His watch and His care, please hear this, especially if you're walking through suffering, there is absolutely not one detail in your life that is outside of His watch and His care today. He knows it all. He knows you more completely than you know yourself. This is a powerful picture and intimate picture at the same time. All things comprehensively. Each of us completely. You know all things.

His mercy is personal.

Fourth, picture of the revelation of God. Power is great, purpose is guaranteed, His knowledge is perfect, and fourth, His mercy is personal. Up until this point, when we see Job talking about God it is indirect, it is impersonal. That's the picture we see leading up to this, and I want you to listen to his conclusion in chapter 42:5. Listen to what he says, "My ears," Job said, "*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you*" (Job 42:5).

This is why – James 5:11, you might write that down, James 5:11 gives commentary on Job and says, "You've heard of the steadfastness of Job, you've seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is," James 5:11 says, "the Lord is compassionate and merciful" based on the picture of Job. This is James takeaway from the book of Job. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, James 5:11.

This is the picture. When we walk through suffering we are not trusting, some blind, impersonal force that is out there. That's not the picture of God in Job. We're trusting in a personally merciful God who is intimately involved in every single detail of our lives. His mercy is personal.

Now, I want you to see how Job responds to this. It tells us something about our response. When we see these things about God our initial response, our initial reaction is awe. Job is seemingly silenced in chapters 32 all the way to 42, especially Job 38-42. "What can I say, what can I say," you don't see Job saying much in these chapters at all. He's silenced. He's silenced before the majesty of God. Silenced in awe of God.

Now, it would be a great gift if we could come to this point of awe for God without walking through what Job has just walked through, but the reality is, what Scripture is teaching us is you don't get to this point in awe until you've gone through this journey before.

And again, that's not a comforting truth if our goal in life is to be happy and have things go well all of the time and have our best life, carefree life. That's not good news. But if our goal is deep knowledge of God, then this is good news. Not easy news, it's painful news, but it's good news. This is where God has been bringing Job to. To see Him, to be silenced before Him.

And listen to what he does, in his awe, he says, "*Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes*" (Job 42:6). Our initial reaction is awe and we repent of our sin. Now, think about it with me. Job says, "I despise myself, repent in dust and ashes." What is Job repenting of here? He is not, he's not coming around to what his friends had said for 29

chapters. "Okay, Bildad and Eliphaz and Zophar, you're right, I did some things wrong to cause this to happen, now I repent." That's not what he's repenting of. What is he repenting of?

The picture is, not of sin that caused his suffering, but he's repenting, he's turning, that's the whole picture. Literally when it says "I despise myself", this could be rendered "I reject what I've said." He is turning from the small view of God that he had in his suffering to the great view of God that he has now. And we repent small thinking about God, and turn to great thinking about God. That's the picture here, and I got a feeling it's a confession that every single one of us in our lives in this room can, should make, constantly turning from small views of God to true, to real, to great and grand views of God. This is how he turns. Our initial reaction is awe, it leads us to turn from small views of God to great views of God and our eternal response is adoration.

You read the rest of chapter 42 and you will see Job restored. You will see Job's health restored. You see Job's family restored. You see his friends restored. You see Job's possessions restored. Now, some have said, "Well, that's the point of the book of Job, to trust God, you'll get all your stuff back." We have seen that is not the point of the book of Job. So what is the point, when all of this comes back around? People have even said, "Well, this kind of minimizes Job's suffering. He turned out okay." Let's not be so trite, don't be so trite as to think that all of this just took away all the suffering Job went through – "No big deal you lost 10 children, Job, now you got more stuff." No. A survivor, the holocaust does not have his suffering minimized when he settles into a comfortable life in urban Europe or America. Suffering is still real. The lingering effects of that is still real and they're here in Job.

So what's the reason why this book ends this way then? And I believe the picture is clear. Job 42 ends the way it does to teach us, to show us that suffering does not have last word. It doesn't have the last word. There is an eternal response here that is not suffering. "Winds that knocked down your house and killed your children, it's not the last word in Job. Boils and sores all over your body, not the last word." God has the last word over suffering. Cancer does not have the last word, AIDS does not have the last word, mental illness does not have the last word, tornadoes and earthquakes and hurricanes and school shootings do not have the last word. Unexpected tragedies do not have the last word. God has the last word. The cross doesn't have the last word. Resurrection, last word. God has the last word every time, and the beauty for the people of God is that when we walk through suffering, suffering is not the end. God is the end, and He has the last word every time, that's the gospel. That is the gospel.

Our eternal response then is not suffering. Our eternal response is adoration, where forever we will rejoice in our God, forever. Not wallow in suffering and pain and tears and hardship. Forever, we will rejoice in our God. Every single person, every single man, woman, student, boy, girl do you know for sure that you will enjoy God for all of eternity? Do you know for sure that when this life is over that you will spend eternity with God free from sin and sorrow and sickness and pain and suffering? And the only way to know for sure is through the gospel.

Now, I want to ask every person if you know that for sure, and if you don't, if you cannot say some unexpected tragedy hits me today in my life, I don't know for sure what that would lead to, then I want you to know that the power of this God is great. He is just, He is merciful, He is the creator of all things and He is the creator of your life. He is the only reason you have breath at this moment.

And His purpose, not only is it guaranteed, His purpose is grand. He sent His Son to die on the cross for your sins that you might not have to bear the payment of sin and suffering that you might be reconciled to God forever and freed from sin, freed from suffering, and He has brought you to this moment right here. He has brought you to this divine moment where His mercy is extremely personal and He is reaching down His hand into your heart and saying trust me, trust me, trust me. Don't play games with religion. Don't live for pleasures of this world. Trust in me to save you from your sins, to free you from your suffering and to give you the hope of eternal life, and He says if you will trust in Him, you can know this.

This is the awesomeness of this moment right now, your life changed for all of eternity by trusting in the gospel, trusting in what Christ did on the cross for you. And if you have never done that then I want to plead with you and urge you not to go on seeking empty pleasures in this world anymore, but to trust in infinite pleasure of God. There's nothing more important in all of eternity than that. To see God as the treasure worth trusting in above everything else.

And for those of you who have trusted in Him, I know that there is a wrestling when we walk through suffering that makes us question things, it makes us wonder things. And the reality is when we walk through suffering in this world, God is worthy of our trust and worthy of our devotion, worthy of our worship. And so I want to give us an opportunity to rejoice in God and to worship through song and worship through story. Listen to these pictures of suffering all around this faith family.

The list goes on and on with this one. It's a brother in this faith family who has gone through kidney disease, diabetes, a heart attack, kidney failure, loss of sight in one eye, a kidney transplant, severe neuropathy, spinal sclerosis in both his lower and upper spine, a stroke in his brain that now alters his balance, all of which now leave him taking 43 pills a day and over 100 units of insulin as he lives in excruciating pain with limited walking ability.

As if that was not enough, the financial struggles have taken him and his family from living on a six-figure salary to having virtually no money to their name, and he writes these words.

'Why?' is a great description of a large part of my life. I kept asking why, selfishly, resisting a closer relationship with God and wearing my Sunday façade until I hit rock bottom. No money, rapidly deteriorating health and nowhere to turn. Even to the point of wanting to end my life. It was at this point that I was driven in to my Bible and onto my knees. I went on for months still selfishly asking why, but through His grace, He started teaching me. He started showing me things that I had never seen before and giving me an understanding of things I had never understood before. It started with a small group of men who loved me, studied with me and ministered to me and eventually the question changed from 'why?' to what are you wanting to teach me through all of this and God answered. He said, I am teaching you to live by faith. He is sovereign. My life is but a piece of His plan and because He is sovereign, I do not need to fear or worry how this will all play out in my life, in my death or thereafter. I just want to be obedient until death. I see His hand at work in my life through suffering, and to quote your student, 'Yes, it has all been and is now worth it just to know Him more and I am positive it will continue to be.'

This is from a college student who has walked through years of an eating disorder. She writes:

There are many things that I could tell you about how this disorder tore my life into shambles. I could tell you how I sometimes just wanted to crawl into a hole and die. I could tell you about my many binges I did just to try and fill some hole that I'd been trying to fill, yet it was never filled. My life became my disorder. All my thoughts and emotions were held secure in that one thing. I felt comfort with it and it was the one thing I thought I could turn to and find solace in, in order to avoid facing the realities of life, but today, I find myself six months into a healing process. I see my life in a whole new light. Do I still struggle with the thoughts of my eating disorder? Sure, I do, but there is a difference now. These thoughts don't control me because God does. I am sure if someone were to ask me five years ago what my life would have looked like now, I would have never dreamed it would have turned out this way, but that is the thing, my life is not in my control, it is in His and I praise Him for how He has used even this struggle to bring me closer to Him."

And finally these words, from a woman who detailed how her and her husband went bankrupt financially, a couple of weeks and then later her mother passed away. Not long after that she was preparing dinner one night for her husband of 24 years and their two daughters. She received a call from the emergency room in a hospital in Birmingham telling her to come down there immediately. Upon arrival, she listened to the doctor's words. I'm sorry, we did all that we can but your husband is gone. She stood there with no husband, no parents, no home, a week's worth of pay in her checking account and two daughters to care for. By all appearances she was alone. And she writes:

At that very moment, with my world swirling around me, I felt the very Hand of God on me. I was not alone. I knew that no matter what happened next my future was secure in God and I knew He would protect me and my girls. When you face homelessness, hunger and hurt, where does your source of strength and hope come from? He put a new song in my mouth and joy in my heart. In the words of scripture I cried out to the Lord in my suffering and He heard my cry. Praise be to my Father, my Comforter, my Truth, my Breath and my Savior.

I want you to hear from three women in our faith family who shared how they lost children either during pregnancy or immediately after their children were born. In the summer of 2006, one of them writes:

I learned I was pregnant with my husband and my first child. We were so excited, at our first doctor's appointment we had an ultrasound and saw the baby and the baby's heartbeat. I remember seeing that child on the ultrasound screen and thinking this is my child. It was my first experience of motherhood and it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen or felt. And before long I began to see God working in a different way from what I expected. One day my husband and I went to the doctor. I had another ultrasound and the sonographer quietly told us, I don't see a heartbeat anymore. I avoid reliving that moment because it was without a doubt the worst experience I have ever had. In the months that followed in losing that child I lost all semblance of the God I had believed in. My husband responded with faith but I responded with anger. God now seemed cruel, indifferent, and while I did not reject Him as God I did reject Him as worthy of love and deserving of faith. I never doubted His greatness but I did question His goodness.

In the months that followed, she and husband became pregnant again and earlier this year their son was born. She describes her faith journey, the lingering loss of their first child and how she still wrestles with the plan of God, and I want you to listen to her conclusion, her honest conclusion.

All I can say now is that God's work in us can seem harsh, but He is still worthy. If I can see that and trust it, though I don't always feel it with all sincerity and faith, then I have not suffered in vain. God has stripped away my shallow faith in Him and replaced it with something different. He wants me to see Him as He is, not some window dressing to an easy life, but an anchor to hold onto when everything else is in a storm around and within me. I am glad to have gone through this because now I can tell other women in my situation what I wish someone had told me, that despite appearances, God can be trusted. That He can be loved by a heart that is broken. And perhaps the greatest lesson I have learned is that God is too big for me to grasp and I wouldn't want it any other way. I should be suspect of a God I can understand, whose ways are predictable and easily approved by me.

From another woman whose fourth child, their son lived a short month in the hospital. She wrote:

It was the whole month of December that he lived and during that month I had to have emergency surgery, my oldest daughter broke her arm, my middle daughter got strep throat, it was Christmas and we were practically living at the hospital. Life was upside down but just for a while. Our hope was in God. While that month was the hardest time I've ever been through, it is also the dearest time of my life, even to this day. I would not know my Savior like I do now had God not allowed that suffering in my life. It was and is such a blessing to me that it's hard to even call it suffering now because of all the fruit I have seen from it. I praise God in His name. It was all Him and for Him may He be glorified.

And finally, a woman whose two biological children both were born with heart defects. One of them did not live through it, and she writes:

I've said it before, but as painful as the loss of our first child was, as painful as it was to take our second child in for a surgery that our first born did not survive, as painful as those things were to us, we would never trade a moment of it because of what we have learned to be true about our awesome and amazing God. This is the essence of eternal life, knowing God as He is. How often we are guilty of seeing Him as we'd like Him to be. I've said throughout our journey with our first child, I felt as though I were on the outside of my body watching myself go through crushing suffering almost as if I were watching someone else. I've noted that had it been otherwise I would likely have not have survived the experience. And after all these years the Lord finally showed me, while reading my Bible one morning, that the reason I felt that way was because it wasn't me at all, but Christ in me that lived through those days. In my weakness He was so strong that I believe He literally lived those painful days in me, through me and for me, while Christ in me is the hope of glory.

God we pray, that you would raise us up to be men and women who see your grand nature in our suffering and who realize the glorious hope of Christ in us. The hope of glory, the

hope of an end to suffering and hope the day when we will glimpse your face and we will sing your praises for all of eternity. All glory be to your name oh God.

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