

Sermon Series: When Life Gets Hard: Big Questions About Pain and Suffering

To be used with: Session 4: What Is God's Answer to Suffering?

Sermon Title Possibilities:

Scripture: Job 40:1-8; 42:1-6

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *When Life Gets Hard*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: God's actions are often beyond our understanding, but we can trust Him.

Introduction: When I was a young teenager, we had a godly woman in our church named Mrs. Smith. She was a high school music teacher, and she had a real heart for teenagers. She was in her 60's by the time I got to know her, but we teens all loved and respected her. She was a very wise woman. She had once been married to a pastor, but they were separated by the time she joined our church. I don't remember all the details, but as I recall, her husband was in a bad accident in which he suffered some brain damage. As a result, he ended up leaving her. To the best of my knowledge, she had no ill-will toward him, since he was not in his right mind. However, she did sometimes tell us what had happened to her marriage, and she used it to remind us that life isn't always fair.

If anyone knew that life isn't fair, it was Job. He endured more calamity in a single day than most of us have faced in a lifetime. These hardships really put his faith to the test. Strangely enough, God never explained to Job why these things happened to him. The Bible tells us why God allowed it, but as far as we know, He never told Job. Be that as it may, Job did learn some lessons from his suffering, and God often uses suffering to teach these same lessons to us. What did Job learn from his afflictions?

- I. A new appreciation of God's power. (Job 40:1-8)
 - A. God finally spoke to Job in chapter 38.
 1. He reminded Job of all that He could do.
 - a. He created the world, and He also sustains it.
 - b. He controls the wind and the waves.
 - c. He asked, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?" (41:1)
 - Scholars disagree over what the "leviathan" was. Personally, I believe it was some huge sea creature that is now extinct. In any case, if God so chose, He could catch the largest creature in the sea as easily as any of us could catch a small fish.
 2. Job had questioned God, but now God was questioning him.
 - a. Did Job presume to know more than God? (vv. 1-2).
 - b. Was he in a position to judge God? (v. 8).
 - B. Why did God tell Job these things?
 1. He was reminding Job that He was still in control.

- a. If God could do all these great things, then He was certainly in control of Job's problems and circumstance.
- b. Job still did not understand why these things happened, but he now knew that he had a very big God!
2. What happens when you know God is in control?
 - a. It doesn't make the pain go away, but it does make it easier to bear.
 - b. It enables you to trust Him even when you don't understand.

II. **A new acceptance of God's purposes.** (Job 42:1-4).

- A. Job now realized God was in control, and he could trust His plans.
 1. God not only has infinite power, but also infinite wisdom.
 - a. He can do everything, so nothing catches Him off guard.
 - b. No thought can be hidden from Him, so He understands our grief, our pain, and our confusion.
 2. He does not ask us to understand, but He does ask us to trust Him.
- B. "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?" – This question is almost identical to the one God asked in Job 38:2.
 1. Job now realized he was foolish to question God.
 - a. God never explained His purposes to Job, so in all likelihood, Job still didn't understand.
 - b. He understood that God was still God, and that was enough.
 2. Is it wrong for us to question God?
 - a. Wrong or not, most of us have done it at one time or another.
 - Even God's most faithful servants doubted Him at times. Show me a person who has never doubted God, and I'll show you someone whose faith has never really been tested.
 - b. The Bible says, "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14).
 - Probably the best book I ever read on dealing with doubt and grief was *Though I Walk Through the Valley*, by Vance Havner. It's a collection of devotional thoughts he recorded during the illness and death of his beloved wife. This really tested his faith, and he was left with quite a few unanswered questions. In the end, though, he realized that God still reigned.

III. **A new awareness of God's presence.** (42:5-6)

- A. Job now felt foolish for doubting God.
 1. His faith was renewed, not because he had received the answer he wanted, but because he knew who God is.
 - a. Since God was in complete control, Job had no need to doubt.
 - b. Has God ever made you feel foolish for doubting Him?
 - When I was in seminary, I often faced financial hardship. Yet God always managed to provide for me. In my twenty-plus years as a pastor, I've seen God move in great ways when I least expected Him to do so. When things like that happen, I'm reminded of Jesus' words to Peter: "O, you of little faith? Why did you doubt?"

2. Job repented “in dust and ashes”.
 - a. When you doubt God, the best thing to do is confess it to Him.
 - b. Ask Him to strengthen your weak faith (Mark 9:24).
- B. We don’t always understand why tragedy strikes, but it does give us a new awareness that God is still with us.
 1. History tells of great men who were shaped by crisis and tragedy.
 - Charles H. Spurgeon often battled depression. Dwight L. Moody was devastated when his son abandoned the Christian faith. George W. Truett nearly quit the ministry when he killed a man in a hunting accident. Adrian Rogers lost an infant son. Jerry Vines had a daughter with a physical disability. Yet God used all of these circumstances to strengthen their faith.
 2. In the end, God restored everything to Job, and then some.
 - a. God does not always promise wealth and prosperity in this life, but He does promise us a new home where is no pain, sickness, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4).
 - b. He will make everything clear to us (1 Cor. 13:9-12).

Conclusion: I’m a fan of southern gospel music, and I believe one of the most talented musicians in that field was Roger Bennett. He used to play piano for the Cathedrals, and when that group broke up, he became manager and pianist for Legacy Five. He used to tell about his battles with cancer. Years ago, he was diagnosed with leukemia. God healed him, but the healing was temporary. The cancer returned some years later, and he went home to heaven a few years ago. During his struggles with cancer, though, he discovered a new relationship with the Lord he had never known before. He had been a Christian for many years, but this cancer brought his faith to a whole new level. I once heard him say he would rather keep the cancer than give up that sweet fellowship with the Lord he had come to know through his illness.

God does not always give us the answers, but He gives us something better. He gives us an assurance that He’s in control of all things, and He gives you a new awareness that He is with you regardless. When you have that kind of peace and assurance, you can face anything this world throws at you.

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