

October 18th: A Season of Suffering

My friends, welcome to our fall series, and welcome to a new season.

As we shift deeper into Fall, and all that this different phase of our year entails, we know these transitions can have a powerful impact on our spiritual lives and on our souls. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are sensitive to change—and yet change is one of the only constants in our world. So this series is an attempt to offer language, support, and encouragement for those transitions that might be occurring in our lives. As we navigate these moments together, we'll be relying on passages from Old Testament wisdom literature to guide us—these texts, stories, and sayings will hopefully speak to our needs for reassurance and clarity. Wherever you are on your faith journey, we invite you to join this conversation and space for reflection.

Before we wrestle with today's text, I invite you to take a deep breath and pray with me.

God who suffered with us and for us, you came to earth with the sole purpose of knowing our human reality. You came to draw close to us, to be with us, and to experience the fullness of our lives, which includes pain and death. You did not shy away, or resist entering into those moments, and we give thanks that you approach us now with empathy and grace. Hold us close in this time of reflection, and whisper to us the words of comfort that we long to hear. May our souls receive rest as we are in your tender embrace. Amen.

As I was scrolling on Instagram one night before bed, I landed on a video that featured the renowned researcher and author Dr. Brene Brown. At an event hosted by Fortune magazine in 2025, she was being interviewed about the current state of the world—all of the political drama, economic uncertainty, mental health struggles, parenting challenges, and more than is currently filling our lives and our screens. Here's what she had to say:

“I’m going to tell you right now, people are not okay. If you’re leading people, you know, people are not okay. I mean folks are still going into Costco with an automatic weapon because they’re out of Cheese Wiz. Like people are emotionally dysregulated, distrustful, and disconnected. So you’re leading a workforce that is increasingly struggling. You’ve got really massive instability geopolitically, changing markets, and AI and tech.”

We’re not going to talk politics this morning, or touch on economics, or discuss AI, but I do want to reflect on this statement that as a whole, our nation, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our churches, are full of people who are currently struggling. Our school pick up lines, grocery stores, town meetings, and Sunday worship are full of people who are having a really really difficult time. Despite the fact that this interview was given more than a year ago, I think it rings true more than ever—and simply pretending that this isn’t reality will not make it go away. We can no longer ignore that a large number of our friends, family members, and maybe even ourselves are not going through a lot right now.

So my friends, this is your invitation as we gather this morning. It’s okay to not be okay. It’s normal right now to not feel normal. If you’re one of those people who is struggling, or feeling lonely, or just spiritually exhausted, then this is the place for you. If you find yourself in a season of suffering—any kind of suffering—then perhaps this will be the moment that you allow yourself to fully acknowledge this truth. This might be the moment for all of us to be vulnerable in front of God and with each other.

To guide us into this conversation, we will once again return to wisdom literature—that section of the Old Testament that specifically speaks to the wide variety of human experiences.

Our passage for this morning comes from the Book of Job, one of the most difficult texts in our biblical canon. Job is a masterclass in what theologians call “the question of theodicy,” or “the problem of suffering,” because it explores the biggest questions that humans have about our universe and

about God. It attempts to answer our deepest fears about bad things happening to good people—why would a loving God allow evil and sin to be part of our world? But unlike Proverbs, which is a series of lectures, or Psalms, which is a catalog of poetry, this type of wisdom literature invites us into a story. In this particular story, we meet a man named Job, who is described as a faithful man. He has all that he could ever desire: family, friends, wealth, and material comforts. He worships God and is upright and blameless—he doesn’t covet his neighbors cattle or engage in idolatry or treat his servants poorly. At the beginning of this narrative, we hear a conversation between God and Satan—God is bragging that Job is one of the greatest men who has ever lived, and so Satan asks God for permission to test Job.

God agrees, and these tests begin almost immediately: first, all of Job’s oxen and donkey are stolen. Then, all the sheep and servants die in a fire. Next, the camels are looted by a neighboring nation. And finally, all of Job’s children are killed when one of the houses collapses on top of their dinner party. It is truly a series of deeply unfortunate events, with each successive loss getting worse and worse. And all of that happens in chapter 1, there is still more! By the time we get to chapter 3, Job is afflicted with painful sores all over his body, and his friends have come to see what has happened. When they arrive, our text says, “Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.”

Out of this intense suffering, Job begins to speak. The passage that we’ve just heard is an extremely vulnerable moment for Job—he is verbally processing all of the traumatic events that have happened to him. Biblical scholars often refer to this type of speech as a “lament,” meaning that it focuses on deep sorrow and grief, especially in a visceral way. Job has been dealt a gut punch, and this chapter is the spiritual wail that comes out of him.

Starting off in verse 3, Job curses the day he was born, which echoes a similar sentiment found in the writings of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. Both of these biblical men cry out to God, wishing that they had never been given life, and expressing the profound pain of their current circumstances. Job gets

pretty graphic with his complaints, even wishing that he had died right as he exited his mother's womb. The lament continues, each verse documenting Job's deep grief and painful emotional state—we are seeing this character at rock bottom, when he is at his weakest and most vulnerable.

Basically, Job's wail boils down to this big question: God, why do I have to go through this? Why do I have to suffer this way? If you love me, why don't you put a stop to this??

Unfortunately, we don't have a final answer for this—or at least a satisfying one. This ambiguity can be profoundly unsettling, and it's even the reason that some people have walked away from faith altogether. I've met many people who have not been able to reconcile this story with the rest of the Bible—they have a hard time trusting that the God who loves us would allow this to happen. Although the Book of Job can make us deeply uncomfortable, I think it's one of the most relatable texts in all of scripture. It forces us to wrestle with the reality of being human, but it also gives us language to express our most secret frustrations and fears. It pushes us outside of our theological comfort zones, but it also affirms that we are not alone—God's people have been lamenting since the beginning.

To help us wrestle with this, I'd like to introduce us to another one of the voices in our spiritual history who attempted to articulate a faithful response for these difficult moments—the Spanish mystic and Catholic poet St. John of the Cross. In his writings, St. John coined the phrase “dark night of the soul,” referring to a time of intense spiritual anguish or an experience of profound suffering and pain. In fleshing out this idea, he wrote the now famous poem, *Noche Oscura*, or “Dark Night” in 1577, revealing it alongside commentary writings titled *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. In these eight simple stanzas, St. John writes of this sense of darkness and the unknowable nature of God, lamenting that there is so much that we do not know and cannot perceive with our human hearts. There's a deep, existential angst, in this type of experience, a humbling realization that we are not in control of the universe.

In our modern world, the phrase “dark night of the soul” has been used by artists and thinkers to describe a crisis of faith—even a figure like Mother Theresa wrote about prolonged periods in her life and ministry when she felt far away from God or burdened by suffering. In her letters, she wrote that between 1948 and her death in 1997, she only had brief experiences of relief from this spiritual and emotional pain. That’s almost five decades!

But the real question is, what should you do if you find yourself in this season? What can you do if you find yourself crying out to God or in a “dark night of the soul”? What can we learn from our biblical story, and St. John of the Cross?

My friends, I’m going to be completely honest with you—sometimes there is nothing that we can do to immediately fix our circumstances or prevent ourselves or our loved ones from suffering. Sometimes, there is no magic wand we can wave, no special prayer we can pray that will cure us. The final chapters of the book of Job tells us that we are not God, we do not have that power.

But still, there is hope.

In the middle of Job’s narrative, his friends start to give all kinds of explanations for his situation—plus all kinds of bad advice. They tell him that he must have done something to deserve God’s wrath. They tell him that he must have sinned somehow and needs to repent. They tell him that this is punishment for some moral failure that Job has not disclosed. All of this is a perfect example of what not to do when your friend is in a tough spot.

They actually got it right the first time, when they came to Job and sat with him in silence. This was the thing Job needed most: supportive, compassionate companions who did not shy away from being close to him. He needed others to bear witness to his suffering with him, showing him that he did not have to navigate the experiences alone. He needed people to offer him space for his own grief, to be heard by those who knew him best. He needed their presence

more than he ever needed their judgement. He needed their company more than he ever needed their advice.

This is an important lesson for us about our own posture towards our suffering and the suffering of others.

When we are in our own seasons of suffering, perhaps what we need most is friends who are willing to walk with us. Perhaps what our souls most long for is reassurance that we have companions for our journey, who will be there when we need them most. Perhaps what will make our suffering bearable is knowing that we are not alone, that God sends us a community of people with whom we can reveal our truest selves.

Perhaps what you are being called to do today or this week is simply to listen, to sit down and get into the mess of being human with someone you love. Perhaps you will discover an opportunity to join someone you know in their pain, not so that you can fix it, but so that they know they are loved. Perhaps you are being invited to bear witness to something, so that in years or even decades, that person will look back and remember the power of your presence. You don't have to say the right words, you just have to be there.

My friends, hold onto this thought as you prepare for whatever is in front of you: seasons of suffering may come and go, but the support we can offer each other can carry us through.

Amen.