Good morning. I'm glad I wore good shoes today with all the standing Quentin had us doing, so. Just kidding. For you younger people, that's not a big deal, so.

So 40 years ago, I was a junior high, actually 40 years ago I was a high school geometry teacher. So for those of you who have math anxiety, I apologize. But one of the— math is full of formulas, right? So one of the formulas that you all probably learned, hopefully, in high school geometry, maybe most of you have forgotten it. A squared plus B squared equals C squared in what?

Right triangle, right? Where A and B are the sides of the right triangle. It means you have a right angle for those of you who didn't do well in geometry, right? And C is the hypotenuse, right? The distance squared plus the distance squared equals that squared.

Always true. I mean, it's not true in what they call non-Euclidean geometry, but we're not gonna mess with that. Always true. Mathematics deals with formulas that are true, right? 2 plus 2 is?

Square root of 64 is? That was, some of you are slow on that one, sorry. But mathematics deals with formulas that are true. And we like formulas that are true, maybe not in math but in life. But let me show you one of the formulas that we would like to be true and that's this.

If I believe in God and I'm a good person, my life will go well.

Believe in God plus be good, all will be well. We desperately, desperately want that to be true. We hope to be true, but the book of Job, which we'll start looking at this morning, destroys that formula and says, not true, not true. 'Cause if I'm believing in God and I'm a good person, what do I do if life doesn't work out right or something happens? And so this one, this is not a chalkboard, but if it was, I'd just erase it, right?

Because we want that to be true, we desperately want it to be true, I want it to be true, But then when life happens, trauma happens, then we're like, it confuses us, we're confused. But this is not the formula of following Jesus. This is not the formula that God wants for us. So the series is called In the Ashes. Book of Job, suffering, pain.

Merry Christmas, by the way, right? So ashes, 'cause Job's in the ashes at times. Life's not good. So it's a 4-week series. Job's 42 chapters, we're doing it in 4 weeks in time to kind of break and give you some Christmas stuff.

But it's not inappropriate to do Job any time of the year, especially even during the holidays, 'cause some of you know what suffering and pain is like even now. Not to the extent of Job, but we all get that.

We all know what that's like. So before I read the passage, I'm gonna reintroduce something I've done before, and I'm gonna reintroduce the weird meter. The weird meter is when we see things in Scripture.

Where's my weird meter? All right. See things in the Bible, the supernatural reality of Christianity. There are things that are happening in the invisible world we do not know and do not see. But the invisible world is just as real as the visible.

So this passage, the weird meter hits high. I'm just telling you that in advance because it's one of those things in Scripture like, wow, this is weird. All right. But weird is another word for supernatural. Whatever you want to use it for.

So we're doing the Old Testament book of Job. It's thought to be the oldest book of the Old Testament. We don't know exactly all the dates and everything, but in the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel talks about Job as if he's an historical person. New Testament book of James, James talks about Job as if he was an historical person. So we believe it's a true story, and it happened in this land of Uz, not Oz, Uz, which is somewhere near modern-day Israel.

We don't know exactly, but there's a couple different options. But I'm gonna read the start of chapter 1. You're gonna join me at some part, and I'll tell you when, 'cause I just wanna read, we're gonna look at chapter 1 and 2, 'cause that sets the story for everything in the rest of the 42 chapters of the book. All right? So in the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job.

This man was blameless, He was upright, he feared God, he shunned evil. Like, he was really good, right? He was good.

He had 7 sons and 3 daughters. Furthermore, he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys. He had 2 Mercedes and an S, you know, whatever. You know, he had everything, right? He had a large number of servants.

He was, the Bible tells us, the greatest man among all the people of the East.

So wow, all seems to be well with him, so this must be, he must believe in God and must be, he is a good person, we're told that.

Next verse says this, one day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord. Some Bibles translate it as one day the divine beings came to present themselves present themselves before the Lord. Here's where the weird reader goes a little wild. And Satan also came with them.

So Satan is like welcome in the courts of the Lord?

The word for Satan here can be translated the adversary or the accuser. But he shows up. So whatever that means, he still has access to God. I don't— we don't fully— I don't understand it. It's weird.

But I believe it's true. Satan shows up, God notices him, and we're gonna read this next part together. Put this on the screen. Here's what we're gonna do.

You're gonna read the God part, I'm gonna read the Satan part. I thought about flipping that, but that might not be fair, right? All right. So you're gonna read the God part. This is a conversation, it's almost word for word of what God and Satan were talking about in the unseen world with the weird meter on high, all right?

So 1, 2, 3, you guys be God. 1, 2, 3, go.

Just roaming around the earth.

Does Job fear God for nothing? You've blessed him. Take all that away, he will surely curse you to your face.

Very well then, you may test him. It's like the minions from the cartoon.

What? Wait, what? What's going on here, God? Why are you telling Satan, yes, you can test Job? What kind of God does that?

But it is one of those parts of scripture you read it and you're like, wait, what? What did God just say? So here's what happens next. And you're going to read something here in a second with me, but you'll, you'll join me in a second. This is what happens in the rest in chapter 1.

So one day when Job's sons and daughters, 10 of them in all, you remember, were feasting and drinking while at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, the oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby. The Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword and I'm the only one who escaped attack. So donkeys gone, oxen gone, bank account lessened. While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, the fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I'm the only one who has escaped to tell you.

Job's 401 is dropping, right? While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, The Chaldeans formed 3 raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword. I'm the only one who escaped to tell you. While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's

house when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert struck the 4 corners of the house.

It collapsed on them and they are dead. I'm the only one who has escaped to tell you.

So, moment of silence for the pain of Job. I don't wanna fast forward too quickly to the next part of the passage, but Job's fortunes are gone, his kids are gone, Just think for a second of the trauma that must have felt like for him. Whew. At this, Bible tells us, Job got up and tore his robe, shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said, naked I come from my mother's womb, naked I will depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. So in all of this, the Bible tells us, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing, 'cause that's what Satan wanted. He said, he's gonna curse you to your face. He's gonna charge you, God, with wrongdoing, because if this formula's true, if things don't go well, then he's gonna curse you to your face, God.

So Job's already in a horrible place. Chapter 2, after all that, Satan comes back and hangs around, and you're gonna read the same part, and you're gonna be God again. So this is the scene 2 of the exact— so Job's already decimated with grief of his kids dying and all of his money and his animals taken away. So now the next one. This is Job 2.

Go ahead, ready, 1, 2, 3, go.

I'm just roaming around the earth.

Read that last sentence again, and he's still, go.

Skin for skin, that's Satan's way of saying, yeah, let me at his body. Skin for skin, but now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh. He will surely curse you to your face.

It's another one of those, wait, what? You're letting him do more, God? This is what happens next. So Satan went off from the presence of the Lord, and he afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.

Then Job took a broken piece of— a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife, said to him, are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die. That's what Satan said Job would do, curse God and die. In my own personal everyday translation, she was saying give God the middle finger and walk away.

Curse God and die. Understandable, right, for her to say that? Like,

look at all the— she's experienced all this loss. Job replies to her, you're talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?

And then it's repeated, the same thing in this chapter as it was in the first chapter. In all of this, Job did not sin in what he said.

You may have heard of the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory. It has a list of all these stressful things that can happen in your life. If you have a spouse die, it's 100 stress points. Death of a close family member, 63 points. Major health change, 44 points.

Major business adjustment, 39 points. Change in the number of arguments with your spouse, 35 points.

And if you get 300 or more points at a given time, it's almost guaranteed you'll have incredible health risks over the next 2 years. A studied thing. Just for the fun of it, I put into AI asking about stress points for Indiana University, and it said if IU loses a close game, it's 5 stress points, right? If they lose when they're favored, it's 15, right? If they lose a championship, it's 25 stress points.

This is what AI told me. But if they lose to Purdue, it's 50 stress points. Half of what it would be if your spouse died, right? So we laugh at that, but we understand. So I'm not laughing at the stress of Job and the trauma of Job, and I'm not laughing at any of your trauma and stress.

It's real, and it doesn't just affect your head, it affects your soul and your whole body, and we wonder why it's happening. Years ago, I read a book by, there's a pastor, he's still alive but he's not pastoring anymore, his name's Chuck Swindoll, pastored in California, wrote a lot of good books and he's a good speaker. Speaker, but he had a quote in one of his books that was meaningful to me at a certain time in my life, and he wrote this: Nothing touches me that has not passed through the hands of my Heavenly Father. Nothing. Nothing touches me that hasn't first passed through the hands of my Heavenly Father.

Nothing. I wrote that out on a note card, had it hanging from the radio dial in my car, and what was my traumatic event? A girl broke up with me, all right? But to me, that felt painful. It was stressful.

I'm not comparing myself to Job. I'm not comparing myself to the death of a spouse, but we all have different kinds of trauma, and at those times, we all start asking these questions of God. Does it pass through the hands of God? What do we make of all this suffering? And some of you right now are in the midst of stuff where your stress, pain, trauma is high and you might be asking God the question, why?

And if it's not now, some of you, we don't want it for anybody, in the next year you're gonna be asking God, why is this happening? So we're gonna look at 2 parts of this, 2 questions of this. First, we're gonna look about what's the role of the enemy in your life and my life?

What's up with God here? What's he doing here? What's he like? The first thing is this, you have an enemy. You have an enemy.

Bible tells us very clear, Satan, he's the accuser, he shows up in this story, he's the adversary, but he shows up all throughout the Bible, including the very beginning with Adam and Eve and the very end in Revelation, he shows up and he hates you. This is weird meter stuff, but if you don't believe in Satan, you don't believe he's active in your life, you're gonna have a hard time explaining things that happen to you, right? So you have an enemy who accuses you. He's also called the accuser. In Revelation 12, we're told he accuses you and me day and night before the throne of God.

We don't understand why he gets access to the throne room of God, but day and night he's telling God accusing you and me of all the reasons why God shouldn't be proud of us, why God shouldn't love us, day and night. You have an enemy who hates you. Revelation 12 said he's full of rage and fury and he's setting himself against— at war against us, those who have the Spirit of Jesus in us. You have an enemy who steals, kills, and destroys, Jesus said, John chapter 10. He's the thief of joy.

He will steal and kill and destroy anything that's meaningful to you, 'cause he wants you to curse God and die, right? You have an enemy who lies to you. Jesus in John chapter 8 said he's the father of all lies. So some of you, sometimes with me, I start believing things that aren't true because the lie gets pounded in my head and I don't have enough Fortitude to reject it, say it's not from God. And you have an enemy who wants to destroy you.

1 Peter 5, he's walking around trying to figure out who he can devour. So this is like heavy stuff. You have an enemy. He hates you, he accuses you. And the story of your life, this is a quote from a favorite author of mine, the story of your life is the long and brutal assault on your heart by the one who knows what you could be and he fears it.

The story of your life is the long and brutal assault on your heart by the one who knows what you could be and he fears it. Satan's afraid of who you could be, who God made you to be, so he's gonna try to kill your heart any way he can. Because see, you and I live in the greatest love story ever. Greatest love story ever. Jesus, the cross, resurrection, greatest love story ever, but it's set in a world at war.

It's like a movie, right? The greatest love story ever dropped into Normandy, right? Dropped in the middle of the Civil War, whatever, ever, it's a great love story set in a world at war. So the dynamics you like in all those movies and stories, that's because your story's that way and my story's that way. That's why they ring true with us.

So we have an enemy, we'll establish that. But now we, you also have a God, and you have a God, like, when this happens, we start asking, what are you doing, God? 'Cause here's some conclusions you might draw. They're wrong, they're incorrect. I've gone to these places before, but I'm saying this because the Book of Job, if nothing else, helps to refine God.

One conclusion you might draw is you have a God who is indifferent to your pain. Doesn't God care?

I mean, the rest of the book of Job, he's got 3 friends that are religious friends and they come to some of these conclusions 'cause they can't— So you have a God who is indifferent to your pain. That's one option.

Option 2 is you have a God who is punitive when you mess up. God must be angry at you. You must have done something wrong. Now, sometimes God disciplines those he loves, but other times things are happening in your life and as far as you know, your heart's clean before God. You have no idea what's going on.

But then you start thinking, is God just punishing me for something? I had a friend of mine tell me one time, I don't know why all this stuff's happening in my life. I must have done something wrong. That's bad theology. Unless you know there's a clear sin that you're resisting God on, But if you're just assuming, I must, you know, it's secret to me, but I must have done something wrong, that's why this is happening to me.

So that's another. Third option, you have a God who's willing to throw you to the wolves just for sport, see what you can do. Fourth option is you have a God who's just not powerful enough to protect you. Doesn't have the power, Satan can, you know, Satan's stronger, it's like a boxing match, Another option is you have a God who's not good enough to care.

You have a God who's angry with you. All these are options that even good Christian men and women start concluding about God because we so much believe in this formula, we have to— then we start questioning God and we do what Satan wants us to do, maybe not aggressively, but we curse God and walk away.

There was a situation years ago where I was talking to a young college student and she came in my office and she had a broken arm. And I

said, what happened? Oh, I broke it hitting against the brick wall when I left church last week. I was like, oh, why'd you hit it against the brick wall when you left church? Well, you were talking about the goodness of God and I was so angry because I was abused, sexually abused by my uncle when I was a kid and that, why would a good God allow that?

So I left church early and smacked my arm I hit my arm against the brick and broke it. And I said, well, you have good reason to walk away from God. You have good reason to curse God and die. But I said, I'm gonna encourage you to get back in the boxing ring and go a few rounds with God to his face, 'cause he loves you. You have good reason to walk away, 'cause she was like, God can't be good if he allows that.

Last option you might think is you have a God who just isn't there. I'm done with this Christianity thing. God's not there. Or here's what I'm gonna encourage you to conclude, and this will sound odd to you as much as it sounds odd to me when I wrote it down. You have a God who is enthusiastically for you, and takes great delight in you.

You're like, wait a minute, we're talking about Job suffering and scraping his boils off and his kid's dead and his money's gone and you're saying, you would say to God, you would say to Job, you have a God who's enthusiastically for you and takes great delight in you. I wouldn't say to somebody in the midst of suffering, of course not. I would not blame you to slap me in the face if I did that, right? But it's true and I'm saying this for you to say this to yourself 'cause think about this. When, when Satan comes into the stage in chapter 1, who brings up Job?

God does. Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him in all the earth.

Seems like God's pretty proud of Job. There is no one like him at all. He's blameless, he's upright, he fears God, he shuns evil. It sounds like God takes great delight in this guy, like he's the greatest man in the East. There is no one like him in all the earth.

So God's speaking out of delight. This is his guy. This is the dude of all dudes that God says, he gets me, he loves me. Have you considered him?

Scripture tells us Psalm 147, the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. Zephaniah, Old Testament prophet, says, the Lord your God is with you. He's a mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you. His love will no longer rebuke you, but he will rejoice over you with singing.

Prophet Isaiah, the Lord will take delight in you. So will your God

rejoice over you.

So God rejoices and he takes great delight in you and I when we're living the life he wants us to live.

So, but I'll say it this way. So it's out of God's delight in Job that he gives Satan permission to test him.

And you might say, I reject that phrase. Understandable if you want to, but it's true. It's out of God's love. He didn't just pick Job randomly. He didn't just like, Satan, why don't you go get them?

He wasn't being random. He picked his best all-star.

I take delight in this guy. I love him. Even when Job— when Satan comes back a second time, have you considered my servant Job?

There's no one like him.

So it's out of God's incredible delight for Job that he allows that to happen. Now again, if I'm in the middle of suffering and you say that to me, I may not take it at the moment, but I'm saying to all of us Take it into your hearts now so when those hard times come, it's etched down there that God is not angry at you, he's not punitive, he's not indifferent, he's not weak. He takes great delight in you. And Satan wants nothing else but to get you to believe that's not true, and he wants you to believe the opposite of that is God doesn't care about you. You're just a random pawn in the big game of life for God.

No, he takes delight in you. So if you look at the book of Job, Job's greatest anxiety in the whole book was his fear that God was angry with him and his loss of relationship with God, 'cause God was silent for a while. So yes, Job was sad about all the things that happened to him, of course he was, but he seemed most consumed by I miss my relationship with God. 'Cause he delighted in his relationship with God and he felt the delight of God in him.

So let me jump to the New Testament here as we think about this in terms of applying to us. So I'm gonna jump now to the Last Supper. The disciples had just finished arguing about who's the greatest. Way to go, guys. I'm the greatest, Peter.

Andrew, no, I'm the greatest, I'm the greatest. We're gonna get the right-hand throne and left-hand throne. And Jesus hears him and Jesus says to him, no, no, you have stood by me through all this and you will all sit on thrones. So he's saying, you're my guys. But then he says to Satan something that reminds me, gives me a little bit of shadows of Job.

So put this on the screen. This is what God says to Simon, also known as Peter. All right, this is right before Jesus is gonna get arrested and crucified. So say this out loud with me, all right? This is what Jesus says to Simon, also called Peter.

1, 2, 3. Simon, Simon, Satan asks to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. Sifting like wheat means you're shaking all the wheat to get all the chaff out and the dirt and the stones, and I don't wanna be shaken.

And then the passage that Quentin read beforehand was from the Psalm about I will not be shaken, but the point is I'm not gonna be shaken by the shaking, right? So, and when this, the you here is plural, so he's saying that to Simon Peter, but it's about all the disciples. Maybe it's about all of us.

Maybe Satan, why would Satan stop asking God for permission to sift people? We don't want that. I'm not volunteering any of us for that role. But Jesus says this, he says, I'm gonna pray for you. Now me, my first reaction is, well, can you just stop Satan from doing this?

But for whatever reason, in God's great power and goodness and freedom of our will, he's like, no, Jesus is gonna pray for you in the midst of those things. He's for you, he's enthusiastically for you. Go to the next slide now, here's what we're gonna do. So you've noticed I put blanks up there where Peter's name was, Simon's name was. We're gonna do this same, we're gonna say this out loud again, but I want you, we're gonna say it a little quieter, I want you to put your first name in the blank and imagine that that might be happening, could be happening, maybe already has happened.

All right, so like for me, I would say Matt, Matt, Satan has asked as if you was wheat. So I'm gonna say 1, 2, 3, we're gonna say it. I'm just not gonna shout or anything, just say it so you can hear yourself say it, but use your name and imagine if that really could be happening. All right, 1, 2, 3, here we go. Matt, Matt, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Matt, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

Feels a little more personal that way.

But if it happens, it's because God delights in you. Sounds so odd to say it, but it's true. And then in the midst of the suffering, go to the Hebrews passage on the screen. In the midst of suffering, this is what we know. Since he himself, Jesus, has gone through the suffering and testing, he's able to help us when we're being tested.

He goes with us, right? Handful of years ago, I'll close with this,

handful of years ago, I just went on a little bit of a jaunt in my own ministry, in a good way, and I interviewed different religious leaders in Bloomington. Mormon, Hindu, Tibetan Buddhist, Islam, and I just, I asked them what their religion thought about Jesus and what were their thoughts and stuff. So I was meeting with a, The lama, not the Dalai Lama, but the head guy at the Tibetan Buddhist monastery who believes he's the 10th incarnation of a Buddhist spirit. He had to leave the room for a second, but his assistant was still there.

She was an American white woman. And I said, so how long have you been Tibetan Buddhist? And she said, well, since 20 years ago. And I said, why did you? She said, I used to be a Christian.

I was like, oh really? Why did you change from being a Christian to Tibetan Buddhist? She said, I just couldn't handle The painful scene of Jesus on the cross, all the pain and the suffering. I was like, okay, then, and I don't know why I asked her this next question, it just came to me. I said, okay, so what would you say to a prisoner at Auschwitz who could come out to the fence and talk to you?

'Cause I was thinking about the part of him with pain and suffering. She said, I would say I wanna live my life in such a way so what's happening to you will never happen to anybody else.

And as I drove away, I thought, okay, but that person at the fence walked back into hell.

But this is where Jesus is different. Jesus asks us that question, and we're asked that question. Jesus says, I'm gonna cut the fence. I'm going back in hell with you. I'm gonna be with you in your pain.

And as I drove away, I thought, Jesus is so So unique. There's no other world religion where the main leader of the religion will go with you into pain. It's like the song saying, who else is worthy? Nobody.

Not Joseph Smith of Mormonism, not the Hindu gods, not Muhammad's view of Allah. None of those gods go with you into suffering and understand it and are with you, none. So there's, who else is worthy, right?

There's no one like Jesus. So why would you not follow him? And I'll say this knowing it could happen to me, why would you not follow him through pain? 'Cause he's with you in ways that are intimate and delightful. He loves you.

So whatever you're going through, some of you might feel like right now, I'm totally being shaken up. I hate my life and I don't know what God's doing.

Let's, I'll pray for you. But before I pray, I'm gonna say we're gonna

have a response time. And what we do is we have communion, which is we don't dismiss our rows. You come up during the songs, take the cup and the bread. Jesus said, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, he said this the same night he told Simon he was gonna be sifted, every time you eat this and drink this, remember me.

And I always like to remind people or suggest things to remember. Remember, Jesus goes with you into pain and suffering. All right, so if you put this juice and your bread into your body, you're inviting that Spirit in you. There'll be people on the sides who can pray for you. They have lanyards on if you just want prayer.

You might just say, I just need to know Jesus is with me in the midst of what I'm going through.

We're gonna sing, we're gonna respond to the Holy Spirit. Jesus, I do pray for everybody here, especially those who might be in the deepest throes of pain and suffering right now, and they're asking you the understandable question, why me, what are you doing? So God, I pray that in your wisdom and your kindness and your love and in your delight, you will be with them and they will hear you and know you're with them. 'Cause we love you. Jesus, we love you, there's no one like you.

We ask this all in your name, amen.