



TIME OF GRACE®

Seriously, God? God Won't Tell Me Why There's Pain?

Study Notes

Summary

What strikes most readers of Job is how long the book is. The fairly short introduction and conclusion are dwarfed by dozens of chapters of words—Arguments. Complaints. Accusations. Laments. But perhaps the wordiness is the point. Perhaps Job is structured to prove to us that suffering is a long and challenging journey, even for the faithful, a journey that tests us and forces us to run back to our living Redeemer.

- Why Pain?
 - ❖ Maybe because _____.
 - ❖ Maybe because _____.



William Blake, Public Domain, via Wikipedia Commons

- **Job 4:8** — ⁸ As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.

- **Job 8:4** — ⁴ When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.
- **Job 11:6b** — Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.
- **Job 9:2b** — But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?
- **Job 6:24** — ²⁴ “Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong.
- **Job 15:12,13** — ¹² Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash, ¹³ so that you vent your rage against God and pour out such words from your mouth?
- **Job 16:3** — Will your long-winded speeches never end?
- **Job 18:3** — Why are we regarded as cattle and considered stupid in your sight?
- **Job 21:29** — Have you never questioned those who travel? Have you paid no regard to their accounts—that the wicked are spared from the day of calamity.
- **Job 22:5,6** — Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? ⁶ You demanded security from your relatives for no reason; you stripped people of their clothing, leaving them naked.
- **Job 27:5** — I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity.
- **Job 36:4** — Be assured that my words are not false; one who has perfect knowledge is with you.
- **Job 34:12** — It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.
- **Job 28:20,21,23** — Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing... God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells.
- Why pain?
 - ❖ We _____.
 - ❖ Why pain? We don't know _____, but we know _____.
- **Job 19:25-27** — I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Points to Ponder

1. Don't miss next week's conclusion to the book of Job when God himself arrives and faces Job's questions about suffering.

2. In your hardest season of life, did your friends help you or hurt you spiritually? If you could go back, what might you have said/done differently?
3. Read all of Job 38-42 before next weekend. How does God's reply to Job fit perfectly with the truths of Job 28:20-28?

Homework for Next Week

Read Job 38-42

Time of Grace Ministry
Seriously God? God Won't Tell Me Why There's Pain?
Select verses from the book of Job
October 23, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

Why do some people struggle with anxiety from their earliest memories? Why are there some really, really amazing women who can't conceive children? So, if we don't know why, why would we trust God?

I've learned over the years of being a pastor that when you're in pain, the most natural question for you to ask is actually the most dangerous question for you to ask. "Why?" "Why is this happening? Why am I going through this? Why is God doing this, or sending this, or permitting this, or allowing this?" However you want to package it. "Why did my family -- Why did I have to go through something so difficult?" "Why?" It's a natural question, it's the question we all ask, but I want to pose to you today that it's actually a spiritually dangerous question because of the two ways that most people answer it. If you're taking notes in your program today, if you're watching at home and want to know the big ideas of this message, write this down.

I think maybe the number one way that people answer the "why" question is this. Maybe you're going through such pain because you are bad. You're suffering, and maybe the reason is because God is trying to get you back for what you did. There's some truth to that, right? Like, if it feels like God is disappointed, he's crying, if the rain is coming down on life, if it's difficult, the instinct that we have is "What did I do wrong? How was I bad? Why is God getting back at me?" I remember thinking this when I had the flu as a kid, you know, sitting in the bathroom throwing up, like, "God, I don't know what I did but I promise I'll be -- whatever it is, I'll change it." Like, we just think that our suffering is so intimately connected with our sin. And here's why we think that, because it mostly is, right? You don't have to be a Bible person to believe that when you make bad choices, you often end up with a bad life, right? If you're just letting it rip, partying through every weekend, don't be shocked when you wake up with a hangover, right?

That physical pain and suffering isn't some mysterious plan of God, that's just you being dumb. If you get into a relationship and you just, you need to get your way, you're just looking for that person who will meet your needs and do what you want, and so you're controlling, and you're arguing. If it ends up as a mess, maybe you had it coming. If you totally ignore God and his amazing promises to watch over you and protect you, and instead, you just soak in constant social media, that the sky is falling, the world is pointless, everyone hates each other, if you feel anxious at the end of the day, maybe that's because you've made bad choices.

In the Bible, the Book of Proverbs talks about this all the time, that there is so, so often a connection between personal sin and personal suffering. So, it's not crazy when life is hard and we think, "There must be some connection to what I did." But here's the problem. There's often

a connection between sin and suffering, but there's not always a connection between sin and suffering, right? An innocent little kid is hurt by a family member or ten-year-old gets cancer. A random car wreck changes a family forever, right? That's not like I got drunk and there was a hangover. I was argumentative and no one wants to be with me. It seems so random, there's no connection between those two things. And so people struggle, well, if this pain isn't happening because I'm bad, what's the only other logical answer? I'll tell you.

Maybe, reason number two, because God is bad. It's incredibly logical, right? If God is supposedly present everywhere, knows everything, and can do anything, then think about your personal suffering, right? You're the little kid who can't sleep because anxiety is turning in your stomach, and supposedly God is present, he's in the room, supposedly he knows exactly how hard it is for you, and supposedly he has the power, doesn't break a sweat, he snaps his fingers and it's gone, and it's fixed. And so you see why the most natural question is the most dangerous question. You suffer, I suffer, we go through pain, are we bad? Is God mad? Should we feel guilty, shameful? Should we disconnect from faith, shake a fist to heaven, deny his existence, move on with this life? Like, it's a real struggle, it's an intense struggle, and actually, it's a struggle that has existed for a long, long time.

We've been studying the Book of Job here for the past few weeks in church. It's this Book of wisdom that's tucked inside, about the middle of your Bible. The Book of Job is essentially about the love of God, right? Will we love God when life is hard? Can we be sure that God loves us when life is hard? But those of you who've read the Book of Job before know that the bulk of it, 80 plus percent of it is really about this question, "Why?"

There's this guy Job, his life is falling apart, he's lost his health, he's lost his wealth, all ten of his children die in this tragic accident. His three friends show up, then a fourth friend shows up late, and when those five guys get together in the same room and start talking to each other, the question they need to answer is "Why did this happen? Like, Job, why did you lose everything? Why are your children gone?" They lifted their eyes to the heavens, and they asked the same thing that you and I would, "Why?" And apparently it was quite a discussion because it doesn't take just a verse or a chapter in the Book of Job, it spans from Job 3 all the way through Job 37; 35 straight chapters of the Bible that are trying to answer the question "Why?"

So, today I'm not going to read all of it to you, you don't have time for that. But I do want to show what happens when we answer the "Why" question in the wrong way. And then I want to show you some little nuggets of wisdom that are packed inside of this book that you might have missed that might help you the next time you ask the question, "Why?"

Now, if you want to know a good summary for Job chapters 3 - 37, it might be this picture that artist William Blake drew in the 1800s. Apparently, Job worked out. Wow, man! And you can kind of guess how Job's three friends there on the right are answering the question, "Why?" They had come to comfort him, they were apparently very good friends, they took more than seven days of PTO time just to be there and sympathize with him, but when the question needed to be answered, "Why did this happened to Job?" This was their accusation. "Because you must be bad."

Let me machine gun a bunch of verses from this 35-chapter argument to you. One of Job's friends, a man named Eliphaz said this, "Job, as I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it." That's a bit polite. You get what he's saying? Reap what you sow. Why do you have all this trouble? Because you started it. Ouch! Gets worse when his friend Bildad opens his mouth, he says, "Job, when your children sinned against God, God gave them over to the penalty of their sin. Why are your children dead? Because they were bad." Zophar, his other friend, added this, "Know this, Job: God has even forgotten some of your sins. I know your body is covered in boils, I know all ten of your children are dead, I know you've lost everything you had, but I think actually, God forgot half of the bad stuff that you did, you should have it worse." So they thought.

And Job was in intense pain, he knows that none of this is true, and so he fires back in Job 9, he says, "How can mere mortals prove their innocence before God? Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong. Can you bring the proof?" And because Job knows that he hasn't done anything wrong, nothing that would match up with this kind of suffering, what he ends up doing is turning on God, and he says, "Man, I wish I could bring God to court. If he wasn't a coward who hides himself up in heaven, I would go on the prosecution and accuse him of doing me -- I don't deserve this, I didn't sin. Why am I suffering?" And when Job says that, that maybe God is bad, his friends lose it. One of his friends says this, "Job, why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you vent your rage against God and pour out such words from your mouth?" Job's exhausted by it, so he replies, "Will your long-winded speeches never end?" "Job, why are we regarded as cattle and considered stupid in your sight?" And Job fires back, "Have you never questioned those who travel? Have you paid no regard to their accounts--that the wicked are spared from the day of calamity?" Wait, if bad people have it good, then maybe the system doesn't work like you think. Eliphaz says, "Is not your wickedness great? Job, are not your sins endless? You demanded security from your relatives for no reason; you stripped people of their clothing, leaving them naked." Job knows that's a lie, it's false testimony, so he doubles down and says, "I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity."

And you can read the rest if you want to, 35 chapters of that, I've given you the low lights of the conversation. But if you do, you might be wondering, "Why is this in the Bible?" Like, of all the things, God gives us one book, the Bible. It only has so many chapters, and verses, and pages, why would he waste, why would he take 35 chapters for us to listen to five men argue? And I think the answer is this. Because when you and I insist on trying to figure out why, it all goes wrong. Alright, we hear something bad has happened to someone, maybe a friend is getting a divorce, and we start to think, I wonder what they did. Or we go through some physical suffering, like me as a little kid with the flu, and we wonder, God, I don't know what it is, but it must be something. Forgive me. Or like the atheist, we shake our head and our fists at the heavens, and we wonder if God is the same God we believed in when we were little kids.

The Book of Job is a massive warning about what happens when we insist on knowing why. And you might be tempted to skim through it page after page, after page, after page. But actually, it's worth your time because nestled in the middle of these long-winded arguments are two truths

that can actually help you when you don't understand why this is happening and you really want to know. Let me point them out to you real quickly. In Job 28, there's what my Bible calls an "interlude" about wisdom. "Where does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing... God understands the way to it, and he," circle this word, "alone... knows where it dwells." Like where is the answer? How are you going to understand why you went through that physically, or financially, or relationally, in your marriage, with your body, with whatever, with our world? The answer... is hidden. It's like a diamond buried somewhere in the ground that you will never see. God sees it, he knows the answer, perfect explanation, it's right here in his head, but God has not chosen to reveal it, and therefore, you and I don't know it.

It's hard to swallow, but I want you to write this down. This book of wisdom from the Old Testament answers the question, "Why pain?" Here's the biblical answer. We... don't... know... why. We don't know why. We could guess, but that would be dangerous. We could assume, but that might be dumb. Read the Bible cover to cover and you will not find out why. Don't just skim the Book of Job, read every verse, just one a day for the rest of your life and you still won't find out why. Study Greek and Hebrew like the pastors from our church so you can get to the original language of the Scriptures, you still won't know why. Start from the front cover, make it all the way to the back past the maps, do you know where you will find the answer to your specific pain? You will not.

So, I want you to practice with me the wisest answer to the "why" question. I need you to put down your pens, your phones. If you're at home, please do this too, alright? I need you to put one hand like this, kind of palm up. Alright, got one, thanks, play along with me. Need you to put the other hand like this, alright? And now, on the count of three, I just, I need you to put your shoulder bones inside of your ears, ready? One, two, three. It's like an emoji for that, is there? Okay, now we're going to practice being -- Don't pick up your pens just yet because I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions and I want you to give me the biblical wisest answer, alright? Hands up. Okay.

So, here's my first question. Why do some people lose their parents when they are just little kids? Why do some people struggle with anxiety from their earliest memories? Why are there some really, really amazing women who can't conceive children? Why are there car accidents with people who are like the best people in town? Why did you go through that one year of your life that you wish you could redo? Why was there that one season of pain that you just did not get? I don't know. I don't know. I wish I did. If I knew, I'd tell you. If we could dig down and find it like a chunk of gold, we'd dig for it, but God alone knows the answer to that question, right? You and I can guess all day long and maybe some of the guesses will make us feel better, right? Maybe God allows you to battle depression because he wanted to take that mess and turn it into a ministry, right. He wanted to use you to reach out to someone who was depressed and it just wouldn't have worked if you wouldn't have understood what it's like to be there.

Maybe God had a purpose for that. Maybe he knew that that doctor, that nurse didn't even believe in God and he wanted to use your faithfulness, and your suffering in the hospital room, that they would look at it and say, "I don't have that." Maybe that was his purpose. Maybe God

let that person in your family die because he knew that your cousin would come to the funeral and finally realize that what matters in the end is not your money, it's not your body, it's not your job, it's your faith in Jesus, and it was that spark that got him back closer. Maybe that was the reason, but I don't know why, right? I've told some of you that my little brother died at six weeks old. Why did God do that to my parents? We have a guess. My mom thinks after Jimmy died, like, "I was holding you so tightly, I was going to raise you up to know Jesus so well." It's possible that I'm here today because that happened to my brother. But honestly, I don't know and neither do you.

So, if we don't know why, why would we trust God? It's pretty convenient, right? If you were dating somebody and they weren't there for you when you needed them, and you say, "Well, why didn't you help?" And they said, "I'm not going to tell you." You'd be like, "Uhhhhh, I'm bouncing, right? Why would you trust a person who doesn't tell you what they know? And actually, we find that answer in the Book of Job too. In the midst of the ups and downs of his faith, of yelling at God, questioning God, accusing God, Job actually gives us this answer, I want you to write it down. He says, "We don't know why, but we do know who." Job says, "We don't know why this happened, but we do know who God is." God has not revealed why he didn't stop this pain, but he has revealed many things about himself, and if we know who God is, if we know what God is like, then we learn to take a deep breath and trust that he's God, a God we can trust, a God we don't have to question.

The Bible would say, "Be still and know that he's God." I've told some of you the story of when my daughters were little. My now teenagers were just like, you know, Sesame Street diaper, chunk little rolls on their wrists kind of age. Kim and I took them to the doctor for their checkup and for their shots, right? And there are Kim and I, as the strange woman that we just met uncaps a needle and plunges it into the fat thigh of my little girl. You ever seen a kid whose mouth screams about three seconds before the voice comes out? You know, the eyes get huge with tears, and Brooklyn and Maya couldn't say it in the moment, but they were looking at us with an expression that said, "Why? Why aren't you stopping this dad? Who is this woman? Why is she stabbing me and why are you smiling?" In fact, we weren't just watching, we were holding down those little legs so they could stab them again! And we didn't tell her why. A little kid doesn't get how medicine and how the human body works. In those moments, here's all we could depend on. That she doesn't know why, but she does know who, alright? The dad who's holding her down is the dad who just snuggled with her in her jammies that morning, right? The mom who is standing by and not stopping it is the same mom who gave life to her, who fed her, who cleaned up her messes, who kissed her on the forehead, who read little books to her in her lap. They didn't get why, but we hope that they got who.

And I hope you do too. Here's how Job put it in the midst of his mess. Job 19: "I know, I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end my redeemer will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see God with my own eyes- I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Friends, how could God be bad if he sent his son for us? Listen, I don't know your story, but in my life, I haven't been to prison, I haven't been arrested, but I have done a thousand things I would be ashamed for you to know, but he loved me. And there are sins that you'd rather forget, there are secrets that some of you are

keeping, God knows all of it, and yet he loves you. If we were not God's BFFs but his enemies, just living for ourselves, ignoring the Bible, ignoring prayer, and God's response to that kind of rebellion was to send a Redeemer? He cannot be bad. Someone who loves their enemies cannot be bad. Someone who gives us a thousand chances to hear the good news and believe it cannot be bad.

So, here's the deal, I don't know why but I do know who. I hope you don't suffer today or this week, or this year, but if you do, don't waste your time. We don't know why. Instead, fix your eyes on who, the Savior who loved you so much, he went through something worse than Job. The Savior who has risen from the grave so that you could have the hope of eternal life without pain, the Savior who is with you, walking through the valley of the shadow of death so you will fear no evil. So do it one more time with me. Why do we suffer? But...God. Let's pray.

Dear God, we wish you'd just tell us why, seems like a reasonable thing to do, but you don't. But it would be insane for us to think that we knew better. It would be so arrogant for us to assume that we could be God and do it better than you do, so give us the kind of humility it takes to accept your non-answer. God, the devil would love us to answer the "why" question in these two ways, to think that we're not forgiven, that you're mad at us, that you're still punishing us, there's something we did. He would love that, or he would love us to turn on you, to question you, to doubt you, to be frustrated with you, instead of being grateful for you.

God, lead us not into those two temptations, deliver us from that evil as we just let the question go and trust that one day you will answer it. Jesus, if 2,000 years ago, you just came and taught us a bunch of rules we probably couldn't trust God, but since you came to seek and to save people who were lost, since you lived a holy life so that we could be clothed in you, since you died to take away every stain and sin, and since you rose from the grave to prove that it's true, we can trust you today.

So, we're asking you, Holy Spirit, to give us faith in Jesus. You said in this world we would have many troubles, and many of us are living proof, but you will never leave us, you will never forsake us, and one day, you and we will stand upon the earth glorious and new, and we will not regret saying, "I don't know why, but I do know who." We pray all these things, Jesus, in your beautiful name. And God's people said, "Amen."