

Job

WHEN TRAGEDY OCCURS

Focal Verses • JOB 1:14-15, 18-19, 22; 3:1-3, 11

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCUSS some of the insights for living with suffering caused by tragedy; BE CHALLENGED to share our feelings about specific tragedies in our own lives; and IDENTIFY ways to work with God to use our suffering to serve a higher purpose.

In Focus

After Roger lost his daughter in a drive-by shooting, he still remained a faithful believer. He even forgave the shooters. But he continued to struggle with the mission that God had given him. God wanted him to evangelize to the underprivileged children in the community where his daughter was murdered.

He went to his minister for counseling, where he hoped to find answers that might reconcile his rebellion against God.

After engaging in small talk, Roger released his well of emotions. “I want to continue the work God set out for me, but I can’t. I keep asking myself, why did God let this happen? And why should I go back into that community?”

His minister listened and let the Holy Spirit guide his words. “Listen, Roger, you must lean on the fact that all the promises of God are endless but they all end with a period. We cannot change God’s periods.” Roger, confused, asked, “What do you mean?” Reverend White continued, “Death, is a period. God has an eternal story that He has written. When a death in the family, floods, or tornadoes come a believer’s way, we cannot help but ask God why He allows those things to happen to His people. What I’m suggesting is that instead of bringing up the question marks, we must strive for a comma.”

Roger sighed in disappointment. “What does a comma have to do with the questions that are weighing on my heart?” “A comma means to wait for the answer. Sometimes the answers to life’s questions come only by trusting what God has written on the next page in eternity. If God wants you in that community, He may very well use your suffering for His higher purpose.”

When tragedy occurs, today’s lesson tells us to continue talking with God. He wants to dialogue with us about everything, even about our doubts and fears.

Keep in Mind

“Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?
In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (from Job 2:10, KJV).



Focal Verses

KJV Job 1:14 And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them:

15 And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

1:18 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

19 And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four

corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

1:22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

3:1 After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day

2 And Job spake, and said,

3 Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.

3:11 Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?

The People, Places, and Times

Job. The central character in the book of Job may have lived during the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was “perfect and upright.” He “feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). He was a responsible husband and father (vv. 2, 5) and was richly blessed with material goods (v. 3). He had good health and was highly respected by others. In short, Job “was the greatest of all the men of the east” (v. 3). “God’s intimate friendship blessed his house” (29:4, NIV).

The Land of Uz. Bible scholars tell us that the location is uncertain. Some believe, however, that it was in the Arabian or Syrian Desert, east of Palestine—east of the Jordan River near Canaan (Israel) where the Israelites would later live. Lamentations 4:21 and Genesis 36:28 suggest that Uz was in the vicinity of Edom. From the Scriptures, most scholars know that Uz had succulent, thriving pastures and crops (Job 1:3). They also know that it lay close to the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who raided them (vv. 14–17).

Eliphaz. He was the first and most prominent of Job’s three friends. He had come from a great distance to comfort an ailing buddy (Job 2:11).

Scriptures describe him as a distinguished thinker or sage of Teman in Edom, which was known for its wisdom (Jeremiah 49:7). Bildad. He was the second friend to visit Job, a Shuhite (one of the sons of Abraham and Keturah from Genesis 25:2; Job 2:11; 8:1, 18:1; 25:1; 42:9). Bible scholars believe that Bildad’s home was the Assyrian land of Shuhu, south of Haran, near the middle Euphrates River. Elihu. He was Job’s young friend, who raised the discussion of Job’s suffering to a higher theological level. He tried to show a hurting Job that greater wisdom comes by inspiration, instead of human experience and tradition (Job 32:2–6, 8–9; 34:1; 35:1; 36:1).

Zophar. He was also a friend and counselor of Job (2:11; 11:1; 20:1; 42:9). His home is unknown, but Bible scholars surmise that it was in Edom or northern Arabia. He agreed with Job’s other friends in attributing Job’s suffering to his sins and spoke bluntly and harshly to Job.

Background

In Job’s day, trouble and suffering were viewed as the consequence of one’s sin. It was

believed that since God is love and all-powerful, He cannot be the source or cause of suffering. Moreover, it was reasoned that since God is holy and has zero tolerance for sin, He cannot let those who sin go unpunished. This line of thought led to the conclusion that sin is at the root of all suffering, trouble, and pain.

Each of Job's peers, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, speaks from this vantage point. From their perspective, Job's tragic situation was evidence of some unconfessed sin in his life.

For example, Eliphaz questions Job (Job 4:7–8; 22:5, 6). Bildad also voices the perspective that sin is behind all suffering (Job 8:3–6, 13; see also Job 18:21). Zophar affirms the thought that Job's suffering is because of some sin in Job's life (Job 11:6). In fact, Zophar proceeds to plead with Job to confess his sin in order that he might again experience God's peace (Job 11:14–19).

These assumptions, however, do not speak to Job's situation. Job is innocent! His defense begs the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Why do bad things happen to good people? And what are good people who suffer to do—curse God, or embrace their pain and recommit their lives to His care? What are good people to do when tragedy occurs and leaves in its wake a torrent of suffering and trouble?

Job is confident that God will eventually come to his aid and give him the resources he needs to go on trusting God and live creatively with the suffering and pain occasioned by tragedy. What faith! This is the faith that overcomes the world. This is the faith that overcomes anything and everything that life may hurl at those who dare to place their lives in God's hands.

At-A-Glance

1. Job's Tragedies (Job 1:14–15)
2. Job's Nonverbal Response to His Tragedies (vv. 18–19)
3. Job's Faith Response to His Tragedies (v. 22)
4. Job's Faith Bogs Down in Despair (3:1–3, 11)

In Depth

1. Job's Tragedies (Job 1:14–15)

Truly, Job was a godly man who left no stone unturned in his devotion to God; yet, within a matter of seconds, he received the worst possible news from four messengers, one on the heels of the other. He was wiped out by natural calamity and the vicious attacks of men. All these tragedies were the work of the Accuser, Satan. Job had no idea that Satan was using him to challenge God. Nor did Job know that his suffering would be used by God to defeat Satan. Job's life had become a combat zone where God and Satan battled for Job's allegiance.

God was pleased to announce to Satan that Job was His unique and most faithful servant. Satan countered God's boast by charging that Job was faithful only because he enjoyed God's favor. In short, Satan told God that when His blessings ceased to flow in Job's direction, "he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:11). For reasons known only to Him, God responded to Satan's challenge in a way that would ultimately test Job's resolve to be faithful in the absence of divine blessings.

As soon as God released Job into Satan's power, Job was struck with a terrible series of tragedies. The writer uses four different scenes to illustrate that over an unknown period of time, Job was deprived of every material blessing and nearly all family and friendship ties. Job was completely

stripped of all God's favors. Eventually, his health failed and he was left destitute (2:7). Satan had Job where he wanted him, namely, outside of God's apparent protection.

We should note, however, that Job's destitute position was due, not to Satan's power, but to God's power. The writer wants his readers to know that Satan could do nothing to Job without God's permission. While Job may not have been immediately aware of God's active and continuing intervention, he was aware of God's availability. Suffering may blind us to God's active intervention, but it need not blind us to His availability. God is always available to us even though we may not be able to see any evidence of His intervention. Faith enables us to see that God is always keeping watch over His own.

2. Job's Nonverbal Response to His Tragedies (vv. 18–19)

Upon hearing the reports of his tragic losses, Job remained silent. The reader is informed of Job's silence by the writer's use of the poetic device, "While he (i.e., the messenger of Job's bad news) was yet speaking" (Job 1:16–18). This phrase implies that Job's first response to the tragedies reported to him was one of complete silence. The sudden news about the successive tragedies renders Job speechless. He says nothing. Job is deeply shaken. He is able to express himself only with the mourning gestures known in ancient Israel. He "rent his mantle [tore his robe], and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground" (v. 20).

Silence is a natural first response to tragedy which affects us personally. We cannot immediately put our feelings into words. We are shocked, stunned, and, in some ways, traumatized. Words elude us. We can only cry and groan inwardly. We may even express ourselves in a primordial scream that expresses our sense of helplessness in the face of circumstances we wish were different but know we cannot change.

Our emotions swing back and forth between anger and denial.

3. Job's Faith Response to His Tragedies (v. 22)

Faith in God is a tremendous source of strength when one is facing tragic loss. Handling the personal stress occasioned by loss is one of life's greatest challenges, and it requires a strong and viable faith.

William E. Hulme has helpfully noted that Job went "from a position of prominence in the community to becoming the butt of scoffers." It is instructive to note, however, that "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22). This statement, which summarizes Job's faith response to the tragedies that had befallen him, teaches at least two things about faith. The first is that faith is not dependent upon the constant flow of God's blessings. Second, while faith may be tested and is often severely shaken, it is not necessarily destroyed by tragic loss.

Although the culmination of Job's losses did not destroy his faith, it did create for him a religious problem, best summarized in the question: What kind of God would allow these tragic things to happen to me when I have been so faithful to Him?

4. Job's Faith Bogs Down in Despair (3:1–3, 11)

The religious problem that Job faced brought him to the very edge of despair. His days of silence had ended. His days of questioning God's mysterious ways with those who trusted Him had begun. Job began to entertain thoughts that caused him to have some doubts about God's fairness and justice. Job knew that he had done everything he could to sustain an ever-growing and intimate relationship with God. What he could not understand, however, was why God had ceased bestowing His blessings. Job wanted desperately to know why God had withdrawn

His care and favor. We tend to be well versed in faith's capacity to believe. We have much homework to do, however, if we are to embrace faith's capacity to doubt or to at least question God's ways with us. Doubt is not faith's enemy, nor is it the opposite of faith. The opposite of faith is unbelief. Unbelief says, "There is no God with whom to discuss the tragedies of life." Faith that dares to doubt says, "There is a God whose ways I do not fully understand. Therefore, I will be honest about my doubts and pray that God will entertain my questions and in His own time reassure me of His care and guidance."

Job's religious problem is common to all who are challenged to live with the terrible consequences of tragedy. Have you ever been in a tragic situation and asked God for help, only to feel that He was not helping at all? You waited and waited, you kept on petitioning God to intervene and change your circumstances, and things grew worse. Job is not hesitant about exercising the faith to engage with doubt. His first step toward dealing with his doubts involves being honest with himself, honest enough to admit his sense of anguish and despair over God's treatment of him. Job is to be commended for having the kind of faith that takes doubt seriously. He "opened . . . his mouth, and cursed his day" (Job 3:1). In other words, Job's situation of loss coupled with his bewilderment about God's ways results in his desire to die without having lived.

Job is not threatening suicide here. Rather, he is lamenting the day of his birth. He reasons that if he had not been born, he would not have experienced the tragedies that had brought him to the point of despair.

Tragedy is a part of living in a fallen world. Moreover, God has not promised people of faith a life free of tragedy. He has promised, however, to be with us when tragedy occurs. In the face of tragedy, we may, like Job, rue the day of our birth. But let us pray that at the end of the day

our faith, and our continued dialogue with God about our doubts, will give us the spiritual resources necessary to live victoriously with the consequences of tragedy.

Search the Scriptures

1. In whose house were Job's sons and daughters partying (Job 1:18)?
2. "And, behold, there came a great wind from the _____, and smote the four corners of the _____, and it fell" (v. 19).
3. "After this opened Job his mouth, and _____ his day" (3:1).
4. "Why did I not give up the _____ when I came out of the belly?" (v. 11).

Discuss the Meaning

1. What can faith do to help us live with tragedy?
2. What was the common thought or theological perspective of the times when tragedy visited Job?
3. What two things have you learned about living with tragedy?

Liberating Lesson

Few, if any, people live tragedy-free lives. Tragedy comes with the territory of living in a fallen world, a world where sin and human error abound. Everyone is a potential recipient of some kind of tragedy. We would all do well, therefore, to develop a faith that does not give up on God when tragedy occurs. God is with us when we celebrate on the mountain peaks of life. He is also with us when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. His guidance and His care are always at our disposal.

Therefore, we would do well to entrust our all, including our doubts, to God's care, and to dare to believe that He will work with people of goodwill to make tragedy's consequences serve some higher purpose. When we do this, our faith will live and grow all the more when tragedy occurs.

Application for Activation

This week, identify someone with whom you are acquainted and who is living with the terrible consequences of some tragedy. Take the time to pray for them. Visit or call them and listen to their story. Raise with them the kinds of questions that will encourage them to discuss their doubts and questions with you and in prayer with God. Listen to them. Empathize with them. You will probably not have answers to their questions. You can, however, encourage them to share their feelings with God in the confidence that He cares and understands.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Source:

For The People, Places, and Times: Pfeiffer, Charles F., Howard F. Vos, and John Rea, eds. *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, 257-258, 517, 520, 931, 1762, 1850.

Say It Correctly

Sabean. SA-bae-an.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 85

Ruth

DAY 86

1 Samuel 1-3

DAY 87

1 Samuel 4-8

DAY 88

1 Samuel 9-12

DAY 89

1 Samuel 13-14

DAY 90

1 Samuel 15-17

DAY 91

1 Samuel 18-20