

Making It Through the Misery

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Text: Job 2:11 - 31:40
- B. It's one thing to experience **a sudden tragedy** — like the loss of a child or the discovery of some dreaded disease in your body. It's quite another thing to experience **the relentless misery of that loss for months or even years afterward**
- C. **When Misery Drags On for Months... How do we make it through the misery?**
- D. Women have been known to lift automobiles off of their pinned husbands after an accident and then later collapse under the shock of what's happened.
- E. There is a spiritual counterpart to this physical phenomenon.
 - 1. In the stunned moment of tragedy many a Christian has been given the grace to sustain the burden with a genuine word of faith.
 - 2. **[S1]** Consider Job in his reaction to the terrible losses that he suffered in one day: (Job 1:20-21 NKJV) Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. {21} And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."
 - 3. But then later under the relentless sequence of empty rooms and chairs and shirts and arms, even the Christian sometimes collapses in sobs of baffled dismay.
- F. **Job's suffering did not end with Chapter 2.** His suffering was even compounded with the explanations of his friends as to why he was suffering. "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2).
- G. It is **one thing** to bear a sudden tragedy. It is quite **another** to suffer its pain for weeks and months and even years afterward.
- H. **How do we make it through the misery?**

- I. In one afternoon Job had lost his ten children and all his wealth. Shortly afterward he was afflicted with a horrid skin disease. In both these tragedies he kept his faith and revered the sovereign hand of God.
 1. In 1:21 he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."
 2. **[S2]** (Job 2:10 NKJV) But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.
 3. He affirmed the absoluteness of God's control over all things, and he bowed in submission to these heavy blows.
- J. **But Job's faith and reverence were not rewarded by a quick healing of his disease and an immediate restoration of all the things and family that he had lost.**
 1. **[S3]** (Job 7:2-3 NKJV) Like a servant who earnestly desires the shade, And like a hired man who eagerly looks for his wages, {3} So I have been allotted months of futility, And wearisome nights have been appointed to me.
 2. (Job 7:2-3 NIV) Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, {3} so **I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.**
 3. Job's misery dragged on for months.
- K. So the question now arises: **Why?** Had not Job shown that God was his most precious treasure, even more precious than health? God's honor had been upheld. Why does not God now restore the fortunes of Job? Why not now skip to chapter 42 where the happy ending comes?
 1. **The answer is surely that Job (and we!) has much yet to learn about suffering and about God.**
 2. And those among us who have had to endure month after month of misery would feel that the story is naïve and inauthentic if it ended at chapter 2.

L. **Job's Months of Misery.** So let us look together at the months of Job's misery. We begin at 2:11-13:

1. **[S4]** {11} Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him.
2. **[S5]** {12} And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. {13} So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.

I. **[S6] Three Cycles of Conversation**

A. **For the next 29 chapters** (through chapter 31) Job will be responding to what these three friends have to say about his suffering. There are three cycles in the conversation.

B. **Cycle 1**

- Eliphaz—4 & 5
- Job—6 & 7
- Bildad—8
- Job—9 & 10
- Zophar—11
- Job—12–14

C. **Cycle 2**

- Eliphaz—15
- Job—16–17
- Bildad—18
- Job—19
- Zophar—20
- Job—21

D. **Cycle 3**

- Eliphaz—22
- Job—23–24

- Bildad—25
- Job—26–31
- Zophar—(silence)

E. **But today our question is: what does the author of this book want us to learn from the speeches of Job's three friends and from Job's responses to them as he endures month after month of misery?**

II. **[S7] The First Cycle Prompted by Job's Outburst** (Job 3)

- A. The thing that prompts Job's friends to make their speeches is his outburst in chapter 3. After seven days of silence with his friends (and probably weeks of suffering before they came)...
- B. **[S8]** (Job 3:1-3 NIV) After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. {2} He said: {3} "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'"
- C. **[S9]** (Job 3:9-11 NIV) May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, {10} for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes. {11} "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?"
- D. The weeks of relentless pain had taken their toll on Job's serenity.
- E. Job cannot see any reason now for why he should have ever been given life or why his life should be preserved if there is going to be so much misery. And so he protests that the day of his birth should never have been. And of course this is a protest against God, because, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away" (1:21).
- F. **[S10]** (Job 3:26 NIV) I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

III. **[S11] Eliphaz Breaks In** (Job 4-5)

- A. When the three friends of Job hear this protest, they can't stay silent any longer. So **Eliphaz speaks in chapters 4–5** and sets the course for Bildad and Zophar as well. He spells out a **principle** that runs through all the speeches of the three friends.

- B. We see **Eliphaz's theological principle** first in 4:7–8:
 - 1. **[S11A]** (Job 4:7-8 NIV) "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? {8} As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.
 - 2. In other words, **trouble comes to those who sin, but the innocent do not perish**. Suffering is the result of sin, and prosperity is the result of righteousness.
- C. But Eliphaz is careful to note in 4:17 that all men are sinners, "Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?"
- D. So he also admits in 5:17 that some suffering is the loving chastening of God. "Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves; therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty."
- E. **[S12] Eliphaz's Counsel:**
 - 1. (Job 5:8,11 NIV) "But if it were I, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him... The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety."
 - 2. He insinuates that Job has not really sought God the way he should. That does not fit God's description of Job! See Job 1:8; 2:3.
 - 3. **[S13]** Eliphaz implies in 5:18–19 that Job would be delivered if only he would commit his way to God: (Job 5:17-18 NIV) "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. {18} For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.

IV. **[S14] Job Protests His Innocence** (Job 6-7)

- A. **Job knows that Eliphaz's explanation is too simple because it doesn't answer the hard questions.**
 - 1. It doesn't answer why some suffer in an extraordinary way even though they have not sinned in an extraordinary way, but in fact may be godly and upright people.

2. It doesn't answer why some prosper in an extraordinary way even though they are extraordinary sinners.
- B. **[S15]** So Job protests his innocence in **6:8-10**: (Job 6:8-10 NIV) "Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, {9} that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! {10} Then I would still have this consolation-- my joy in unrelenting pain-- that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.
 - C. **[S16]** He returns the rebuke of Eliphaz in **6:24**, (Job 6:24 NIV) "Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong." Job cannot see how Eliphaz' simple principle of justice answers his own case.
 - D. **[S17]** (Job 7:11 NIV) "Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
- V. **[S18] Bildad's Harsh Response and Admonition (Job 8)**
- A. Bildad responds in chapter 8, much less gently than Eliphaz. He vigorously insists on Eliphaz' principle of justice, even for Job's children.
 - B. **[S19]** (Job 8:1-4 NIV) Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: {2} "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. {3} Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? {4} When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.
 1. He is saying: "Your children were guilty of some unknown sin, Job, that's why they were crushed in their house."
 2. And the same goes for Job.
 3. The problem must be that Job is not pure and has not called on God as he should.
 - C. **[S20]** So Bildad admonishes Job in 8:5-6: (Job 8:5-6 NIV) But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, {6} if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.
- VI. **[S21] Job Doesn't Surrender (Job 9-10).**

- A. Job regards this party line as utterly out of sync with the way things really are (see 9:22-24). The way things really are: sometimes the innocent suffer and sometimes the wicked prosper.
 - B. Job insists that he is not guilty as charged. He is righteous.
 - C. **[S22]** (Job 10:1-3 NIV) "I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. {2} I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. {3} Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?"
- VII. **[S23] Zophar's Harsh Rebuke** (Job 11)
- A. Zophar repeats the party line more harshly yet (chapter 11).
 - B. He rebukes Job for claiming to be innocent (vs. 1–6).
 - C. **[S24]** He tells him to put away his sin so that God might restore him (11:13-19): (**Job 11:13-15** NIV) "Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, {14} if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, {15} then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear."
 - D. **Summary: So according to his friends, Job is suffering because he refuses to put iniquity far from him.**
- VIII. **[S25] Job's Sarcastic Response** (Job 12-14)
- A. Job responds in chapters 12–14 with sarcasm. Everybody knows these moral commonplaces (12:3)! Your maxims are proverbs of ashes (13:12)!
 - B. He longs to argue his case with God because he knows God is just and he is convinced he is innocent.
 - C. **[S26]** (Job 13:3-4 NIV) But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God. {4} You, however, smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you!
- IX. **[S27] The Following Cycles of Conversation** (Job 15-31)
- A. That is the end of the first cycle of speeches. The next two do not reveal any new arguments, but they show **the three**

friends becoming more harsh and less credible in the face of Job's integrity and realism.

B. Again and again the three friends insist that suffering follows wickedness.

1. Eliphaz: it is the wicked man that writhes in pain (15:20).
2. Bildad: it is the light of the wicked that is put out (18:5).
3. Zophar: the joy of the wicked is short (20:5).

C. **The Impotence of the Theology of Job's Friends**

1. In the last speech of **Eliphaz** in **chapter 22**, the former gentle friend attacks Job with brutality:
 - a. **[S28]** (Job 22:5-10 NIV) Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? {6} You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked.
 - b. **[S29]** {7} You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, {8} though you were a powerful man, owning land-- an honored man, living on it. {9} And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. {10} That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you,
 - c. Was this true? No! These are not facts. They are imaginings in the mind of Eliphaz, forced on him by the inadequacy of his theology to deal with reality.
2. **[S30]** (back to chart) But all of this is so preposterous that when **Bildad** makes his last speech in chapter 25, he can only manage six little verses about the general sinfulness of man.
3. And when it is finally Zophar's turn to round out the third cycle, he has nothing to say at all.
4. And the symmetry of the book is broken because **the theology of Job's friends cannot sustain itself to the**

end. Their simple principle of justice has not been able to stand. Job is a good man. Yet he suffers far worse than many wicked people. The correlation of wickedness and suffering in this world simply does not hold.

X. **[S31] A Change in Job**

- A. Something happens to Job through this long conversation with his three friends.
- B. He begins in **chapter 3** with utter dismay and he cries out against the wisdom of God in giving him birth. The duration of his disease had almost defeated the initial stand of faith that he took at the first (1:22; 2:10).
- C. **But little by little you can watch his faith regaining its strength as he fights against the superficial theology of his friends.**
- D. His faith finally breaks out into victory in chapter 19.
 1. In every speech up till then Job had expressed the conviction that he would certainly die and go to the grave in misery. He even longs for it. But **there is a gradual change in the way he talks about dying** (see 7:9-10; 10:20-22; 14:7-14; 17:13-16).
 2. **[S32]** In 19:25-27 Job reaches an answer: (**Job 19:25-27 NIV**) I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. {26} And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; {27} I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!
 3. Job is finally sure that beyond the grave he will meet God as a Redeemer and not an angry Judge. He will be redeemed from all his misery — even if it will only be after death. There will be life and light not just death and darkness.
 4. **This confidence does not answer all Job's questions or solve all his theological problems.** He still is utterly perplexed as to why he should have to suffer as he does. His suffering goes right on. God

seems utterly arbitrary in the way he parcels out suffering and comfort in this life.

5. He has not lost hope. He continues to trust God though He does not understand why things have happened to him.
 6. But he's confident that it is NOT for the reasons that his friends have proposed!
- E. **[S33]** (Job 13:15 NIV) Though He slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to His face.
- F. **[S34]** (blank slide)

SOURCES:

Piper, John. "Job: Wrestling with Suffering (Job 2:11–31:40)." Message by John Piper. July 14, 1985.
<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/job-wrestling-with-suffering>.
 Primary Source!

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Still to come in our study of Job...

Elihu's Speech and God's Speech

After this extended conversation comes a long speech by a young man named Elihu (32–37). Then the Lord himself speaks to Job (39–41). And finally the last chapter (42) describes the reversal and restoration.