

# WHEN LIFE FALLS APART

## SERIES: SHATTERED: THE STORY OF JOB



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Job 1–2

First Message

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### *Job 1–2*

Today we are starting a new series called "Shattered: The Story of Job." Job is a book in the Old Testament. It's found just before the Psalms. The book of Job is 42 chapters (1086 verses) long. In contrast, the Sermon on the Mount, which we just finished studying, was three chapters (111 verses) long. We made it through the Sermon on the Mount in five months, so we feel optimistic that we will be able to make it through Job in five years.

That might be a bit too long for Job, so we will tackle it in seven weeks. This series intentionally falls over Lent, the forty days leading up to Easter. Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, is this Wednesday. One of the purposes of Lent is to reflect on and identify with the suffering of Christ, and our study of Job will lead us into that this year.

The book of Job brings us deep into the theme of suffering. It causes us to ask all kinds of questions: why do good people suffer? How could God allow so much injustice in the world? Where is God in my pain? These are valid and important questions to ask, and we will consider them throughout this series. But the purpose of Job is not to answer these questions. Rather, the purpose of Job (and of our next seven weeks in Job) is to teach us new things about God, about the world, and about ourselves that will strengthen our faith and ultimately drive us to the feet of the one who has suffered for us — Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

### **The worst day of your life**

I'll never forget that day. I was about eight years old when my parents called my sisters and me into the living room. They had us sit down on the couch and said, "Kids, there's something we need to tell you. Your Aunt Cheri is sick. (Cheri was my dad's younger sister, 30 years old at the time.) She has been diagnosed with a disease called Multiple Sclerosis, or MS. MS is a disease that affects your nervous system, and your nervous system controls your whole body. Your aunt knew something was wrong when she started having some issues with her vision.

Then she fell a few times for no apparent reason. We don't yet know what this will mean for your aunt, but MS is very, very serious. This will likely be the thing that takes her life. And we don't know when that will happen, but it will probably be sooner than we want."

My aunt was my hero. She walked on water in my eyes. I couldn't imagine life without her. I was still too young to process all of this, but I knew that it wasn't right. As I listened to my parents, I was scared, sad, shocked, and confused. It felt like my world—not to mention hers—was falling apart.

What do you do when life falls apart? When the phone rings and the doctor says it's cancer. When your parents tell you that they are getting a divorce? When a relationship crumbles? Those moments when it feels like the floor is falling out from underneath you and you can't tell which way is up?

These moments in life—and really all seasons of suffering, whether big or small—become forks in the road. They either drive us away from God, or they bring us closer. Last week, Andy Burnham said these moments either make us bitter or better, and that is so true.

The book of Job starts with the day that Job's life falls apart. As we watch Job lose everything he loves, we will see that somehow Job's faith—his relationship with the Lord—remains intact, even when everything else is taken from him. Job has what we might call a *durable faith* life—a faith that can stand up to the challenges of life, can take the good with the bad, the joy with the pain, and still remain strong.

I want a faith like that. Don't we all want a faith like that? Not some flimsy, fragile relationship with God, but one that is strong, sturdy, and dependable.

Similarly, if we are going to follow Jesus in this world, we need a faith that is durable. Life is hard for all of us; for some more than others, no doubt. I know many of you have suffered far more than I have. But suffering is unavoidable. We will all go through seasons of pain, loss, and despair. These seasons become forks in the

road of our lives that will either draw us deeper in our relationship with God or will send us running in the other direction.

At the beginning of the book of Job, Job demonstrates that he has a durable faith. Let's take a look as we consider how we might develop a durable faith of our own.

## The man who had it all

The book of Job begins by introducing us to the character of Job.

### Job 1:1-3:

**There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3 He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east**

So who is Job? Job is from the land of Uz. We are told that Uz is in the east, meaning not Israel. So Job is almost certainly not an Israelite. He is not a part of God's covenant people.

In these first few verses, we learn that despite this, Job is the man who had it all. He was filthy rich. He was powerful. Probably extremely good looking. He was successful by every worldly standard.

And not only that, but he was also a man of God. He feared the Lord. He was blameless and upright. That's not to say that he was sinless. But he was above reproach from a human perspective. If you looked at his life, there was nothing that you could point to that was not in line with the way God wanted. He did everything right.

Job was the man who had it all.

## Job's questionable motives

### Job 1:4-5:

**His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and**

**consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually**

Here, we have Job regularly offering sacrifices on behalf of his children in case they inadvertently sinned while they were enjoying some good food and drink together. Why did Job do this?

There are basically two options. He's either very holy, or he's a bit neurotic. It could be that Job is so spiritual, so devoted to the Lord, that he goes above and beyond what is required. Not only does he offer sacrifices for his own sins, but he offers them for the potential, intentional sins of his children—way above and beyond what is required.

Or, perhaps Job offers these sacrifices from a place of fear and anxiety. In the ancient world, paganism viewed the gods as incredibly petty. They were unpredictable and temperamental. You never knew exactly what they wanted, so you were always trying to appease them with sacrifices and rituals and offerings—anything that might get them to treat you favorably. Perhaps this is how Job views God. Perhaps he is worried that God is petty, looking for any reason possible to strike down his children. So Job continually offers sacrifices to God on behalf of his children because he is scared that otherwise God might smite them.

The text does not tell us why Job continually offers these sacrifices. It is intentionally ambiguous. This ambiguity is meant to drive us to ask a particular question: How does Job view God? Does Job view God as one who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"? (Exodus 34:6) Or does he view God as petty and unpredictable, looking for any excuse to punish? How does Job view God?

This is not just a question that we must ask of Job. This is a question that we must ask of ourselves. *How do you view God?* Really, this is the essential question of the entire book. Job is not a manual on how to deal with suffering. Job is not a treatise on the problem of evil. Rather, Job is a story designed to shape our understanding of who God is and how he runs the world.

## Theology matters

The purpose of Job is to get us to ask this question: What do you believe about God? The reason that the answer to that question is so important is that durable faith starts with our view of God.

Sometimes we think of theology as something just for the academics. But we all have a theology—a view of God, beliefs about who God is and how he interacts with his people. A relationship with God that is durable enough to withstand the pressure of suffering must begin with a proper theology, a right understanding of who God is.

One of my best friends in high school spend most of his childhood on the mission field in Japan. His family was incredible. They loved the Lord. They loved each other. They loved me. I spent a lot of time with them. The summer after we graduated from high school, my friend's dad had a heart attack while raking leaves in the yard. He was 40 years old. A few days later, he died.

This was obviously devastating to my friend and his family. It was totally unexpected, which made the sense of loss that much more potent. In time, however, the intensity of the grief faded as my friend learned how to navigate life without his father.

Over the next few years, I watched my friend, who seemingly had a vibrant relationship with the Lord, slowly walk away from God. Time and distance kept my friend and I from seeing each other very often after that summer, but I have often wondered what led to his abandoning his faith. That question is between him and the Lord, but I imagine that it comes down to his view of God. There was something about his experience of losing his dad at 18 years old that was incompatible with his picture of God. And so when tragedy hit, when he came to a fork in the road, his view of God became a roadblock on the path to God, and so he chose the other path.

Last week, Andy Burnham was talking about the danger of cozy Christianity. If we think that God's highest priority is our personal comfort, if that's your view of who God is and how he functions, then when suffering places a fork in the road of your life, that view of God will become a roadblock on your path toward God, and you also will start to fade away. If you want to develop a durable faith, you must start by examining your view of God. What do you really think about God? What do you believe about the way that he runs the world? This is the foundation on which a durable faith is built.

## The dilemma of the challenger

**Job 1:6:**

**Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.**

The scene pictured here takes place in the throne room of heaven. A collection of angels present themselves before the Lord, and with them comes the *satan*. Nearly all English translations treat this as a proper name and would have us think of this figure as Satan—that is, the devil, the evil one, the chief enemy of God— but the Hebrew text doesn't say that. Rather than identifying this being as Satan, it describes him as *ha satan*, which means “the challenger” or “the adversary.” I mention this because it's important that we don't get caught up asking questions that the story is not trying to answer, such as “What is Satan doing in heaven? Why doesn't God just destroy Satan when he shows up? Does this kind of thing happen often?” Rather than asking these questions, the story uses the *satan* as a way to getting us to question our view of God and the way that he runs the world.

So God addresses the challenger.

**Job 1:7-8:**

**The Lord said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” 8 And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”**

God affirms that Job really is blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. But here, the challenger inserts his challenge.

**Job 1:9-11:**

**Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”**

The challenge, the accusation, is that Job only follows God because God has blessed him. He doesn't worship God because he wants to or because God deserves it or because it's the right thing to do. He just worships God because of the perks. But take away the blessing, and Job will turn on God in an instant.

So God allows the challenger to test Job, as long as he doesn't harm him physically. In one afternoon, Job loses everything he has. His enemies raid his land, killing all of his servants and stealing most of his flocks and herds. Fire falls from heaven and wipes out the rest. All of his material possessions are gone in a flash. And then his children themselves are taken from him when a strong wind destroys their home and takes their lives.

In an instant, Job's world came crashing down. Everything that he loved was taken from him—his family, his employees, his wealth, his livelihood. Everything. Gone. And Job is left sitting in the wreckage.

This part of the story is hard for us to hear. It's hard to understand. Though Job did nothing at all to deserve it, God allows him to experience total and complete loss—and for what? To make a point? To run an experiment? Just to see what would happen? Is God really that insensitive? Is he that cruel?

These are valid questions and not easy to answer, but let me make a few observations. While we might be quick to accuse God here, Job is not. He eventually does accuse God, but he doesn't start there, nor does he end there. We also have no indication that this type of thing normally happens. We must be careful not to extrapolate out from here to our own suffering. In fact, the book of Job has had the exact opposite effect on so many people. Rather than causing them to accuse God, the book of Job (when read as a whole) has been a great source of comfort and peace for many followers to Jesus who have suffered unimaginable pain.

## Praising God in the pain

With that, let's see how Job responds.

### Job 1:20-22:

**Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.**

Job's responses here is unbelievable. At first, he responds as we would expect. He tears his robe and shaves his head which are both a regular part of the grieving process in the ancient world. But then he falls down and worships! He praises God in the middle of his pain.

Notice that Job doesn't ignore his pain. He acknowledges it. He expresses it. He does not ignore his pain, but nor is he blinded by it. Instead, in the midst of his pain, he worships the Lord, not because of his pain (he is not a masochist), but in spite of his pain.

Notice what Job says: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." Here, Job expresses his view of God and the way he runs the world. He believes that God is in control of all things. His prosperity came from the Lord, and now the Lord has removed it. But God is still in control. And he is still worthy of worship. Job's view of God has not changed. But Job has changed.

## Forged in the fire

Suffering always changes us. And it always changes our relationship with God.

Suffering is like a fire that tests our faith. Before Job suffered, he had no real way of knowing what would happen to his faith if God's blessing was removed from his life. We can't know for certain how we will respond to suffering until we actually suffer. Will our faith hold up? Will we turn towards God, or will we run away? If we turn towards God, as Job did, we are not the same as we were before. Our faith is made stronger. Our relationship with God grows deeper.

When we learn to seek God and even to praise God in the midst of our suffering, our faith becomes more durable, because durable faith is forged in the fire of suffering.

A forge is a fire that heats metal to extremely high temperatures. When you place a hard piece of metal in the fire, it softens and becomes malleable. At this point, the blacksmith can shape the metal by hitting it with a hammer or pounding it with a chisel.

This is what suffering does in our lives. It is hot. It is painful. It is miserable. But it makes us malleable. It brings us to a place of weakness where the Lord is able to take over and shape us into the people that he wants us to be. And it leaves us stronger on the other side.

Before my aunt was diagnosed with MS, she had a strong faith. But it was a faith that had not been through the fire. In the years that followed her diagnosis, the fire raged strong. The MS progressed quickly. Soon, she was using a walker. And shortly after that she was in a wheelchair. The doctors tried all sorts of things to

get the MS to go into remission, but nothing seemed to work. After several years of rapid deterioration, the disease eventually slowed its progress, but the damage couldn't be reversed.

MS changed everything about my aunt's life. Being in a wheelchair meant that she needed quite a bit more help. She lost her ability to drive. She lost her ability to be active, which she loved. When I started snowboarding in high school, she used to say, "Nobody snowboarded when I was growing up. Oh, I wish I could have tried that before ending up in this chair."

MS effected every area of her life, and she hated that. But in all of this, her faith was strengthened. She had some really dark days. We all did. But she kept worshipping. And she kept sharing the light and love of Christ. For years after her diagnosis, every Wednesday she filled her home with high school students to study the Bible and pray together. She was an encouragement to everyone she met. Her suffering strengthened her faith, deepened her character, and opened up door for ministry.

Suffering is not just one of the ways that our faith is made stronger. It is perhaps the primary way that our faith is made stronger. There really is no substitute for pain when it comes to developing the character of Christ in us.

This is one of the reasons for the spiritual disciplines. Some of the disciplines function basically as intentional suffering, allowing us to grow closer to Christ without having to experience true loss.

A few years ago, I started thinking more seriously about fasting, something that I had hardly ever practiced before. I decided to experiment with fasting a bit. The first time I tried a 24-hour fast, I was planning to break the fast at dinner. When I got home from work, it had been 23 hours since my last calorie, and I was shocked at how cranky and irritable I was. Then I thought, if this is what happens to my character after not eating for a day, what would happen if I experienced real pain or suffering? The Lord used this experience to reveal something in my heart so that he could mold me to be more like Jesus.

Many people use Lent as an opportunity to give up something for a season. This might be a great time for you to try fasting if you that is not a regular part of your spiritual rhythm. Paul Taylor and I, the two preachers for this series, plan to fast on Wednesdays during Lent.

Sometimes we might skip breakfast and lunch for a 24-hour fast. Sometimes we might just skip lunch for a 12-hour fast. If you'd like to join us, we'd love to hear how it goes. But do set your expectations low. Much like lifting weights, fasting has minimal effects when we try it once, but can have profound effects when practiced regularly over time.

## The lowest of lows

After Job's remarkable response at the end of chapter 1, the story continues in chapter 2. We are told of another scene in heaven, almost exactly like the first one. The challenger appears in the throne room of God with the other angels. God highlights Job's blameless character again, this time adding that he *still* maintains his integrity even though he has suffered great loss for no apparent reason. The challenger responds and says that Job still follows God because he has experienced loss, but has yet to experience pain—physical pain. However, cause him to suffer physically, and he will curse God to his face. The Lord allows the testing to continue as long as Job's life is spared. And so the challenger goes out and strikes Job, causing his body to be covered with soars from head to toe. Pain is added to loss, and Job is left completely miserable.

Look at Job's response in verses 8-10.

### Job 2:8-10:

**And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.<sup>9</sup> Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die."<sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

Now, Job truly is at the lowest of lows. His only source of comfort is to scrape his soars with broken pieces of pottery. Even his wife, his last possible emotional support, tells him to throw in the towel. It's not worth it, she says. Just curse God and die.

But this is not what Job does. Instead, he reaffirms that his relationship with God is not based on his life circumstances. He believes that God is in control whether his life is full of peace and prosperity or misery and pain. In other case, God is still in control, and he is ready to receive both the good and the bad from his hand. And in all of this, Job does not sin.

How is this possible? How is it possible to have a faith that is that durable? It is clear that theology is not enough. There is no view of God in and of itself that could ever sustain you through the fire of suffering. There must be something else going on here.

Job's response reveals that his faith is not just based on his theology. Instead, it is rooted in a deep and intimate relationship with the Lord. This is our final invite into durable faith: durable faith depends on our relationship with God.

If you think that God's highest priority is your personal comfort, then your faith will crumble when the fire comes. But no mere set of beliefs can sustain you through seasons of intense loss and pain. Your faith cannot live in your head. It must live in your heart. Only a deep and intimate relationship with God can do that—a relationship that is built on trust and love. Then you know that even though it doesn't look like God is in control, he still is. Even though it doesn't feel like God still loves you, he still does—because he has proved it to you over and over again.

## **The circle of faith and suffering**

Durable faith starts with our view of God. It is forged in the fire of suffering, but it depends on our relationship with God. This is not a linear process. Rather, it's cyclical. Before we suffer, we think about God in a certain way. That view of God, and indeed our faith in God, is tested when life gets hard. It is shaped through the fire. What emerges on the other side is a relationship with God that is deeper and more intimate than it was before. It is more personal. You experience more of God's love. Your trust in him grows. Then that relational knowledge shapes your view of God, which leaves you better prepared for the next set of trials that will come. Over and over and over again. This is the circle of faith and suffering.

The opening scenes of Job are Job at his best. This response of faith and worship is remarkable, but he doesn't stay in that place for long. As his story continues, he gets more and more upset with God as he wrestles with the reality of his suffering. Next week we will listen to Job as he laments over his situation. For much of the rest of the book, Job is wrestling with his friends over why he is suffering. Eventually, Job points the finger at God and places the blame on him. In all of this, God

remains silent. But at the end of the book, God does appear to Job to give him an answer. After this encounter with God, Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5).

In other words, he knew things about God, but now he truly knows God. He has been through the circle of faith and suffering. His faith was shaped through the fire of suffering, and his relationship with the Lord has grown immeasurably. This is the path of Job's life, and this is the path that the Lord has for each of us as well.

Our default mode is to avoid suffering at all cost. But suffering is not something to fear. It is painful, by definition. It is miserable. It can take us to some dark places. But suffering is not the enemy. Rather, the enemy is the one who would have us view our suffering as a sign that God has abandoned us—that he does not love us or care about us or even see us. But God does see us in our suffering. He cares so deeply about it in our suffering. In fact, he loves us so much that he would all us to experience suffering and meet us in the midst of our suffering so that we might experience more him—more intimacy, more connection, more of his presence, more of his power, more of his Spirit. So don't avoid suffering at all cost. Instead, look for it as an invitation to grow in intimacy with Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

My aunt Cheri battled MS for eighteen years. After the first year, it went into remission and didn't get much worse for the next twelve years. However, in 2014, it started to progress again. Over the course of a year, Cheri was in and out of the hospital and various long-term care centers. In January of 2015, two months before her 50th birthday, the Lord took her home.

Eight hundred people showed up to her memorial service. Each one of them had been changed by Cheri and her faith. In small ways and big. Some from a distance, some from spending hours and hours with her. Cheri exuded the love and joy of the Lord. Her faith, forged through the fire of suffering, resulted in a depth of faith and character that overflowed and strengthened the faith of those around her. Like Cheri, God wants to use our suffering to draw others close to him as well—all for his glory and our good.