

God gives us. Once we know Jesus and his love, we can also find great comfort in God's power and glory. Here's a way to think of how great our God is. Try to follow this! If the distance between the earth and the sun—92 million miles—were the thickness of a sheet of paper, then the distance between the earth and the nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high. And the distance across our galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high. That's how big it is! And the God who loves you holds all of that in his hands. Do you think he's got your life under his control?

Now, if you don't know God's love, God's power is scary. But when you see Jesus' love, there is nothing better than knowing God's power. Nothing in your life is out of his control. So if God wills it, what can we say? "Okay!" We don't have to know why. God doesn't have to explain himself to us. Because we know that we have a God of justice, grace, and power. God is just. We are not. When we face troubles in life, can we ever really say we don't deserve them? I can't! But God is gracious. Does he ever give us what we really deserve? No! Jesus died in our place. And God is powerful. Why me? Why at this time? I'm not owed an explanation. But I know it's all in God's hands.

Is Job helping you think about suffering? Here's one more thing. I once heard a Navy SEAL describe why SEALs are willing to go through so much suffering in their training. Extreme physical conditions. Days without sleep or food. Why put yourself through that? This SEAL had a simple reason: "I need to be strong, so that if my brother falls in battle, I can pick him up on my back and carry him to safety." Wow! I wouldn't have thought of that. The Bible says, "*Carry each other's burdens...*" (Galatians 6:2). God uses our sufferings to prepare us to comfort others.

Just like Job. For over 3000 years, Job has helped Christians carry their burdens. Job lost everything. His ten children died. But what did he do? He fell to the ground in worship and said, "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*" In that moment, by God's grace, Job got it. Just like a baby enters the world helpless and totally dependent on others, that doesn't really change does it? Has there been a day in your life that hasn't depended on God? No! Then suffering doesn't change anything. "*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*"

Job's faith in suffering has helped billions of Christians face the tests in our own lives. I have some friends here in Saint Peter whose trailer home burned down in January. They lost everything. No insurance. Everything was just gone. I visited them, expecting to see pain and bitterness—maybe anger. But you know what they told me? "We don't understand why, but how can we be upset? God still loves us, so we're just thankful." They get it too, right? Tell yourself what you would tell that newborn baby: "Despite how it looks, everything is happening for you. Everything is under control. One day it will all make perfect sense. *The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*"

Job 1:13-22
Pastor Nathan Nass

Second Sunday of Lent
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¹³One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁶While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁷While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁸While 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, ¹⁹when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ²⁰At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." ²²In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

We get to celebrate two birthdays soon in our house. Isaiah turns six on Tuesday and Samuel turns two next Wednesday. By God's grace I got to watch both of them being born. I heard their first little words. They both said the very same thing. It sounded like this, "Waaa!" I think what it meant was, "What is going on? Why is this man pulling on me? Why am I upside down? Why is it so cold? I was fine the way I was! It was nice and warm in there! Who are all these people? Why is there so much blood? What is that man going to do with that big scissors? Waaa!"

Of course, a newborn baby doesn't understand what's going on. What you want to tell that baby is, "Everything is actually happening for you! Your mom just made a tremendous sacrifice for you. Your dad, well, he's standing there for you. The doctor and the nurses who are pulling on you and poking you... Everything is happening for you! Everything is under control." And yet how does that child feel? Blood everywhere. Cold. Pain. Afraid. "Waaa!" He can't see the big picture. That baby is incapable of understanding it until he gets to watch his own children born.

I'd say that's a picture of the Christian life. What word do we perhaps most often say to God? "Waaa!" I don't mean to make light of life's troubles. How do we often feel? Cold and afraid and alone. What do we think we see? Blood and struggle and everything out of control. Perhaps the most difficult question of life is, "Why does God let people—even Christians—suffer?" That question has probably led more people to fall away from the faith than any other question. But like a newborn baby, we can't see the big picture. We

see suffering in life and wonder what's going on.

That's why God gave us the book of Job in the Bible. The book of Job is unique. It's one of the oldest books of the Bible. And God included it because he wants us to learn about suffering from the most unlikely person—Job. I say “unlikely,” because Job was *“blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.... He was the greatest man among all the people of the East”* (Job 1:1,3). You'd think that Job of all people would have an easy life. The “most righteous man” in the world! If you believe in God, life should be easy, right?

No. God says, “No!” Righteous Job suffered like no one has ever suffered. He had the worst day ever. First, a servant came with the news that thieves had stolen his 500 donkeys and 500 yoke of oxen and murdered his servants. Then, before that man finished talking, another servant ran up and reported that fire from heaven had burned up his 7,000 sheep. But before the second servant even finished, a third came to report that more raiders had seized his 3,000 camels and killed more servants. Boom. Boom. Boom. One moment, Job was the wealthiest man in the world. Then it was all gone. What would that be like today? Cars...life savings...job...house...all gone!

What did he have left? As he heard shock after shock, I bet Job was thinking, “At least I've got my kids. I'm okay as long as I have my kids.” How often don't we think that? But while the third messenger was still speaking, *“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 and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead!’”* The worst day. It kind of puts our suffering into perspective, doesn't it? Now what?

Can you feel Job's pain? Can you picture his frustration? It didn't make sense! But Job couldn't see behind the scenes. There was a reason for Job's suffering. God in heaven had praised Job to the devil as an example of faith. But the devil had said, “God, people only believe in you when times are good.” Is that true for you and me? But God had said, “No. Not Job. Test him.” God knew that Job's faith would prove genuine like gold being refined in fire. Job's suffering wasn't a punishment. God was praising and testing him! But Job didn't know that. He didn't understand.

So what would you have said to him? What do you say to people? The first to try to give him advice was his wife, who must have been suffering greatly herself. Do you know what she said? *“Curse God and die!”* (Job 2:9). What was she saying? “It's God. The problem is God!” Isn't that our default reaction to trouble? “It's not my fault. It's God. God isn't fair.” But blaming God isn't the answer. Job didn't. We're told, *“In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing”* (Job 1:22).

Next Job had three friends who came to him in his agony. They didn't blame God. They did the opposite. They blamed Job: “It's you! You must have sinned!” Some friends! I think when we're suffering, our default is to blame God. When someone else is suffering,

our default is to blame them. “They deserve it! If they would just get their lives together, everything would go well. It's them!” Except, in Job's case it wasn't. God does sometimes let us suffer consequences for our sins. He disciplines us. But it's impossible this side of heaven to know why God is testing us. Suffering isn't a punishment for sin. Think of Jesus. Or think of Job. God wasn't punishing him.

Could this man get some real comfort? One last man gave it a shot. His name was Elihu. He said, “Job, who are you to argue with God? God is just, so we have no right to accuse him of sin. But God is also good, even when he sends troubles to believers. And God is greater than us, so what he does won't always make sense to our thinking. So you need to stop complaining and trust in God!” Was he right? Yes! But Elihu said it without any compassion, so it didn't do any good. It was like whacking Job over the head with the Bible: “God wills it, so accept it!” That's true, but that's not comfort! When someone's suffering, you can say the right thing, but in the wrong way. It's hard, isn't it?

When you hear the story of Job, I bet a lot of you see the story of your life. You face suffering. Every one of us does! And you see how shallow the comfort around us is. Even as a Christian, you find yourself wavering, maybe even doubting God's promises. “God loves me. He loves me not. He loves me, but how could he allow this?” In your low moments, you shout to God, “God, why don't you do something about this?” I bet you can understand why suffering causes so many people to fall away from faith. “God, why don't you come down here and see what this is like? You make it sound so easy! Why don't you come and suffer for a while and see if you like it?”

Do you know God's answer? “I did!” Jesus did. Jesus came and suffered. For us! When we see our newborn baby crying in the hospital, we try to comfort him. Not Jesus. Jesus became the baby! When others suffer, we do our best to give advice like Job's friends did. Not Jesus. Jesus took all the suffering on himself. We said that Job's day was the worst day. That's not quite true. There was one day even worse. Good Friday. When you suffer, when you sin, God doesn't hit you on the head with a Bible. He doesn't yell, “Come on, this is my will. Don't you get it?” Jesus says, “I know. I know what that's like. I'm with you. I forgive you. I love you. I suffered to put an end to suffering!”

Now maybe that last part doesn't seem true. There still is so much suffering! But you've got to see the big picture. Job did. In the middle of his suffering, he said, *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon 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!”* (Job 19:25-27). Job didn't expect his suffering to end on earth. But that was okay. His Redeemer lives. He was going to see God in heaven. And he couldn't wait! Like that newborn baby, you can't make sense of everything going on in your life, but one thing is sure: God in Christ is doing all of this so that you can be with Jesus in heaven. You can trust in Jesus.

Suffering only makes sense in Jesus and his cross, but that's not the only comfort