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Job Introduction (Part 2)



Job - Steve Gregg

In this second part of the introduction to the book of Job by Steve Gregg, he explores the question of why innocent people suffer. Gregg argues that this is a complex issue and that suffering is not a punishment from God. He highlights Job's loyalty to God despite suffering and suggests that the purpose of the suffering was to test Job's faith and demonstrate his righteousness. Gregg also discusses the nature of spiritual warfare and the role of evil in the world.

Transcript

I'd like to continue with our introduction to the book of Job. On the backside of your notes, it's obvious that the men speaking in the book of Job are what we would call wise men in that culture in that day. They were they were the wise, they were the speculators, the thinkers, what we'd call philosophers today.

And the great value of this book is partially in its dealings with one of the greatest philosophical conundrums that people have ever wrestled with. In fact, the book of Job is a testimony that this conundrum is one of the oldest that people have ever sought to address in literature. If Job is the oldest book ever written, and its subject matter is that which is still a matter that is philosophically difficult and discussed today, it even becomes the basis of atheism for many.

And that is why is there suffering, or more especially, why do good people suffer? Some people think that if there's a God, there shouldn't be suffering at all. But others feel like, well, if there is a God, he might have a just complaint about the behavior of some people who are evil. And there may be some justification in God punishing evil people with disaster and so forth.

In fact, we kind of much as we might even have some pity on on the wicked when they suffer horrible things. And we should. I mean, we should pity anybody who suffers.

Yet there's a sense that justice requires that. And when the wicked suffer, it doesn't really make us wonder why would God let that happen? Because it almost seems like it has to happen. If you watch a movie where there's a bad guy, a really bad guy, and you

know, from the beginning of the movie, he's victimizing innocent people, killing civilians and things like that.

He's a terrorist or something like that. You're not satisfied if the movie ends without him being punished. You just figure, of course, the movie is not over yet.

It can't be over yet. He didn't. He's still walking free.

And you'll almost never find a movie that does end without that man being punished because it's understood human nature demands it. That wicked people should pay a price for their crimes. But the more difficult philosophical question is, what about someone who isn't wicked? What about somebody who is a good guy? Someone who's seemingly innocent? Why does God allow him to suffer? And everybody knows of cases and sometimes their own their own experiences is a case in point.

Of somebody who has suffered but has not done something to deserve it, in fact, is maybe a person who's unusually good, like Joseph. Joseph seems to have been a good guy. He's one of the very few people in the Bible against whom no crimes or no sins or no imperfections are listed, which is not to say he was a sinless man, but certainly the Bible gives the impression that his sufferings came on him despite the fact that he was doing everything right.

And he was innocent. Why is that? Why does that happen? Well, that's the thing that people wonder about. And that's as I say, it becomes the basis of atheism for for most atheists.

It's it is the philosophical problem they can't sort out because they say if there's a God and there's suffering, human suffering and misery, then God must not be all good, because if he was all good, he certainly wouldn't want there to be human suffering and misery. Or perhaps he is good, but he's not all powerful. That is, he would like there to be no human misery, but he has no power to prevent it.

So either he's not all good or he's not all powerful. If he's all powerful and can do whatever he wants, then he can't be good because he allows people to suffer, especially innocent people. Suffering is not good.

And so the phenomenon of innocent people suffering seems to be an obvious fact of history. And so some philosophers argue that this proves there's no God, or at least if there's a God, he can't be all good and all powerful. Some other kind of God, maybe.

And really, when you read the modern arguments about atheism from Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris or Daniel Dennett or any of these guys, what you find is that their main argument against God is this philosophical problem. If there's really a God, why did he allow such and such to happen? And so people have a complaint against God like Job had. Job had what looked like a valid complaint against God on this matter.

Job's response was different than that of Richard Dawkins and others. In fact, Richard Dawkins doesn't basically reject God on the basis of his own personal sufferings he's had, but more in the abstract of suffering that's out there. Job, who is actually going through it, never did find this to be some kind of an argument against the existence of God.

Neither he nor his friends ever doubted the existence of God. They were quite convinced of it, in fact. What they couldn't figure out is how this fits into God's policies and programs to allow innocent people to suffer.

And Christians often don't know the answer to that either. And it is the great philosophical dilemma. But even though that is the great philosophical dilemma from our point of view, there are two philosophical questions that are debated in the book of Job.

One is that one that I just mentioned, but the other one, which comes up actually first, is the question that's debated in heaven. You've got a debate on earth in the book of Job between Job and his friends. But you also have, as it were, a debate between God and Satan.

Not that it's a prolonged debate. We don't find God bringing up a lot of arguments. But we do see Satan bringing up arguments.

Arguments that God doesn't agree with and God is quite eager to disprove. So there's this conflict, this debate in heaven, and there's a debate on earth. The debate on earth is certainly about why is it that a man who's seemingly innocent suffers.

But the debate in heaven is on a different question. And that is, why does a man serve God? Why does a good man serve God? Job is a good man and he's serving God. But why is he serving God? The devil thinks he knows and God disagrees with the devil's opinion.

Obviously, the devil thinks that Job is a mercenary, that Job is serving God because he knows what side of the bread the butter is on, because God treats them well, makes them rich, keeps them healthy, takes care of everything for him. Of course, he's going to keep God happy. Who wouldn't keep a benefactor happy who is doing so many things for you? And that's the devil's cynical interpretation of Job's righteousness.

And perhaps the devil takes that view sincerely. Or maybe he's just the accuser of the brethren who, even if he knew it was not true. But I think the devil actually believed his own words.

And if he did, that means the devil himself believed that no one could really serve God disinterestedly. That is to say, without some personal interest, they're gaining something from God. Now, the devil, no doubt, is an astute judge of human character.

The devil has had a long time to observe people, to see what motivates them, to see

what stumbles them, to see where their compromises are, where the edge of their integrity is and what will push them over that edge. And the devil, I believe, had come to the conclusion probably that religious people are religious for selfish reasons. And there's a good reason to suspect that in many cases, because there are people who are involved in religion who clearly are doing it because of what they think they can gain out of it.

And, you know, I've talked to people, for example, on the subject of the tribulation. And these people were like pre-tribulationists. They believed that the rapture was going to happen before the tribulation.

And when that question was challenged of whether that was true, I've heard more than once I've heard people say, well, if there's no rapture before the tribulation, I'm not sure I even want to be a Christian. Now, to my mind, if they don't want to be a Christian, if that's what they want, they've got their wish. So I don't think they are Christians.

A person who says, I won't serve God unless God treats me the way I want him to treat me, is a mercenary. They're not serving God because they think God deserves to be served. They are serving God because they think there's something God will do for them, rescue them from danger, from pain, from trial, you know, keep them out of tribulation.

Provide for them. Of course, there's the word of faith teaching that also seems to have that whole mentality that, you know, if God's a good God, then he wants you rich and healthy. And if you have enough faith, you will be.

And, you know, it's a tenet of the word of faith teaching that all evil comes because of the devil and against the will of God. God does not approve of trials like that. God does not approve of sickness and of poverty and things like that coming on people.

And that's just the devil's doing. And if a man had enough faith, God would not allow those things to happen to him. And so the word of faith teaching attracts a lot of people who don't want to be unhealthy and don't want to be poor and so forth.

And it seems very clear that that kind of preaching would attract those who have that mercenary motive. But even apart from those fringe problematic groups, just the mainstream church often has increased its ranks by presenting God as the ticket to heaven, as the ticket out of hell, as the one who, you know, you need to do yourself a favor and become a Christian, because otherwise you'll really be sorry about it because it's going to hurt you. And so with that kind of preaching, of course, those who are concerned about themselves and want to have the best for themselves, they come to God.

Now, you know, the sad thing about this, it is true. It's part of the truth. The truth is that it is good for you to become a Christian.

It is good to avoid hell and to go to heaven. But the problem is, if Christianity is marketed like any other product is marketed, saying this is beneficial for you. The cost to you will be minimal compared to the benefit you receive.

That's essentially the way the gospel is marketed in the modern world. Well, of course, you're going to get a high percentage of people responding that who really only care about themselves and not about God. People like the ones that Satan, no doubt, had seen many examples of, and he thought Job was like that, but Satan had seen it so, so universally that he thought it was universal.

He thought there was no one who serves God just because God deserves to be served, just because God is worthy to be served, just because God commands by his very nature, love and devotion. You know, the God of the Bible is the only God of the ancient world that ever expected to be loved. If you read the ancient Canaanite and Babylonian and Egyptian texts about their gods, there's never any hint that the people were to love their God.

Fear, yes. Obey, yes. But love is not even in the not even in the picture.

The God of Israel is the only God of the ancient world that expected people to love him. And that's asking an awful lot if you're not lovable. You know, I mean, it's one thing to say, fear me and obey me, and people can do that, but to command people to love you is really unfair unless you're really quite lovable and that a failure to love you is quite an injustice to God.

That God deserves to be loved because he is good, because he is just, because he is generous, because he is all those things that we find lovable in people. Only he is all those things perfectly. That men would serve God because God is good and because God is worthy and because God is lovable and because it's just the right thing to do and that they would do so whether he pays them off or not.

Is what is being debated here. Satan's question is, does Job serve you for nothing? And the rhetorical question suggests, of course not. Job isn't serving you for nothing.

You're paying him. You know, it's he's doing that to keep you happy so that you'll keep the financial and other blessings coming to him. And that's the question that has to be tested.

That's really the primary question that the Book of Job is answering. Not why do good men suffer, but why do good men serve God? Do they serve God even when it doesn't pay to do so? That's the first question that's debated. And of course, it is something that is very pertinent to all of us and people of every age.

Why am I a Christian? Is it because I'm afraid to go to hell? Well, that might be a good reason to be a Christian as opposed to being stupid and not caring about that. But it's

not really what we should hope. We should hope that we would be Christians even if there was no heaven or hell.

Why? What good is it to me? Well, that's the issue. What good is it to me is not supposed to be the question. The question is, what is the ultimate good in the universe? The ultimate good in the universe is that God be glorified.

Why? Because he deserves it. He deserved it before humans were here. And if he would eventually annihilate all humans and give no one heaven and no one hell, but just people were annihilated and no one experienced anything, I don't think that would be a good thing to do.

If that God would still be worthy of glory. The ultimate reality is the glory of God. And a Christian is one who recognizes that he has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Right. I mean, that's what Romans says. All have sinned and fallen short of what? Heaven? No, they've fallen short of giving God the proper glory that he deserves.

And repentance from sin should be repentance from the fact that I have not up to this point in my life given God the proper glory he deserves. And my my repentance needs to be God centered, not me centered, not I'd better repent so I don't get in trouble. And if God deserves glory, he deserves it no matter what happens to me.

I'm not the center of the universe. God is a true worshiper of God, places God and his glory and his concerns at the center of his concerns. And if that is true, as it certainly, I believe, was with Job and with all the martyrs and all the prophets and all the normal.

Worshippers of God that God considered to be the true, the real deal is their interest was not in escaping trouble or courting temporal blessings from God, nor necessarily, by the way, even in courting eternal blessings. You see, this is an important thing. We might say, well, of course we would be good, even though we might have to suffer persecution.

We might be martyrs. We might be poor. We might be sick, but we'll still serve God because there's heaven, because there's rewards later on.

And there indeed there are. The Bible tells us that. But in the Old Testament, they didn't know about those rewards.

God didn't reveal anything about rewards of the afterlife before Jesus came. And therefore, men like Job and Moses and Joseph and all those guys who endured suffering for God, they didn't know that things would get better in their life and they didn't know there'd be a better life after this. They just serve God because that was the right thing to do.

We do know things they didn't know. We know it is worth it that God will never leave

anyone in his debt, that if you suffer for God and receive no reward in this life, that there's still a reward in the next life. Jesus made that very clear when he said, when you make a feast, don't just invite the people who will invite you back and then you'll be repaid.

Invite the lame and the blind and the poor, the people who can't repay you, because then you'll be repaid in the resurrection of the just, he said. What he's saying is you may never be repaid in this life for the sacrifices you make for righteousness sake, but there is a reward ultimately in the resurrection. Now, Job knew something about the resurrection.

At least he had faith in it. He makes some allusion to it, but he doesn't know anything specific. He has no scripture.

He doesn't know of any rewards in heaven. And therefore, his serving God turns out to be truly disinterested. Now, I hope you don't think the word disinterested means uninterested.

He's very interested, but disinterested means a person doing something without having a financial or personal stake or interest to gain from it. That's what a disinterested love means. It means you love someone without having any particular thing you hope to gain out of it.

And his love for God, his loyalty to God was disinterested, but that's what Satan didn't think was the case. And maybe, maybe the test come in our life to see if our love for God is disinterested. You know, one thing I love about the book of Job is it does give us a look behind that curtain in heaven so that we see what lies behind the trials of the righteous.

When trials come upon us, we see what's going on up there. I remember when I received a phone call that my wife had been in an accident and I ran up to the site where it was because it was only a block or two away. And I went there and the paramedics were already there and they said, your wife is dead.

I remember, I just had this picture from Job chapter one and two. I just had this picture of God and Satan looking, watching, like there'd been some kind of negotiations previous to this in heaven. And that, you know, I was, my response was going to be, was being viewed, you know, that, that I'm under testing here.

And that was very helpful to me. It made a huge difference to me. Instead of just thinking, this makes no sense at all.

Why did this happen? You know, we've only been married six months, you know, this shouldn't be happening to someone so young and so forth. I mean, those thoughts never came to me. I just immediately, it was this book and these chapters at the beginning that I thought, I think, I think, that God and the devil have a wager here.

They want to know whether I'll serve God when he does things that make me unhappy or not. And, and you, I think, should think the same thing whenever you are going through unjust trials and so forth, is that there is this thing going on in heaven. And Job is the only book in the Bible that tells us about this.

But Jesus makes some allusion to it, to Peter in Luke chapter 22. He said, he said, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you. He has demanded access to you so he might sift you as wheat.

And what Jesus seems to be saying is that the devil comes to God and seeks occasion, seeks permission to test the faith of God's people. And we have the most graphic picture of it here in this contest between God and Job in heaven. Now, the other question, of course, that everyone knows is a question debated in Job, is that earthly question, the question that the inhabitants of earth are debating.

And that is, why does Job, or for that matter, any good man, suffer? Now, since philosophers have wrestled with this same question for almost forever, obviously, alternative answers have been suggested in different places and in different religions. One of the early answers that was given by ancient peoples and, frankly, is rejected in the book of Job is that of dualism. This is seen especially in the religion of Zoroastrianism, where there are two equal and opposite forces in the universe that are ultimate.

There is the good and there is the bad force. There is these are like equal. They're co-eternal.

They've always been there. But before there's anything else, there were these two equal opposite forces, one good and one bad. And therefore, when good things happen, that's the actions of the good one.

And when bad things happen, that's the actions of the bad one. Obviously, this approaches the picture of God and the devil, but not really, because in the book of Job and in the scriptures, God and the devil are not on the same footing at all. God is sovereign.

He is the creator of the devil and of everything else. The devil has to come and complain and petition God for permission to do something to Job. This is not dualism.

This is a Satan who is subordinate to God. But dualism was one suggestion because that that seems to make it possible to believe there's a God who's all good, but he's not the only actor. It's not his will.

That has always been done because there's this bad God that has as much power as he has. And so you can believe that bad things happen that shouldn't happen and still believe there's a good God out there. He just was powerless to stop it because this bad

God was there, too, and that the bad God took advantage of the situation.

That's dualism. And it's one of the philosophical ways to solve the problem. How could there be a good God and also the unjust suffering? Well, there's a good God and also bad God.

But Job's the book of Job rejects that altogether right from the very beginning, because the bad God, so to speak, the Satan in this and he is called Satan in the Hebrew because the word Satan means adversary. The adversary is how it really reads in Hebrew. The adversary here comes to God and says, you will not let me touch this man.

But let me do so and we'll see what happens then. And it's very clear that God is the one who sends Job his trials. The devil is the one who brings them.

But God is the one who sends them and he is the good God. And Job recognizes all the way through that it's God who did it. He says, remember in chapter one, he says, the Lord gave and the Lord took away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. He doesn't say the Lord gave and the devil took away. You know, the good God gave and the bad God took it away.

No, the same God who gave it is the one who took it away. And I don't know why he did it, because I don't think I deserve it. But blessed be the name of the Lord.

There's only one God out there. And he's the one I'm going to be loyal to no matter what he does. This idea of dualism doesn't ever come into the picture.

Neither Job nor his friends entertain it for a moment. They all are convinced that it's the Almighty who has done this thing to Job. Why he has done it is there is a thing that perplexes him.

But that it was he that did it is not is never questioned. Therefore, the idea of dualism is not suggested as a solution to the problem. Another thing that is not suggested as the solution to the problem is one that became popular after the time of Augustine and the teaching of original and inherited sin, which I'm not denying that there is original sin.

But basically, I remember hearing a Christian say this once. And then I heard many Christians say the same thing later on, that there is a book. Was it Rabbi Kushner who wrote the book? Why bad things happen to good people.

Some of you are too young to remember, but I think it was in the 80s. I think it was in the 1980s, a popular book like a New York Times bestselling book written by a rabbi. I think it's Kushner with his name.

He wrote a book called Why Bad Things Happen to Good People. And many it was a non-Christian book. And many Christian people talking about it gave the same answer.

They said it's the wrong question. They said it's not that bad things happen to good people. There are no good people.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And therefore, there are no good people. Well, that was the answer that many Christians give, especially because of their loyalty to the doctrine of original sin.

It's not the answer that Job gives. Job all the way through indicates that there are good people. Job is one of them.

None less than God himself declared Job to be blameless and upright, a man who issues evil and fears God. And you know, Job protests his own innocence throughout the whole thing. And God apparently agrees with Job on it, as does the narrator.

So if Job is a sinner, and that's why this is happening to him, because there are no good men, including Job, that's a point that is missed entirely by the book. The book does not suggest that although Job was relatively innocent and relatively good, still it is his basic sin. Nature, that is God's complaint against him here.

The idea that there are no good men, no one is really righteous, is a concept the writer of the book Job is unaware of. Because throughout the Old Testament and the New, there are people who are said to be good people. And, you know, in the book of Luke, we see this assessment of John the Baptist's parents.

John the Baptist's parents are described this way in Luke 1, 6. They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. That's a pretty good assessment to make of someone before Jesus even came. This is an Old Testament couple.

And they were blameless. And righteous, like Job was. Now, this doesn't mean that they were truly sinless.

Job knew he wasn't sinless. That's why he offered burnt offerings. He offered offerings because he knew there was such a thing as sin and there needed to be an atonement made for it.

He did not think he was a man who had never done any wrong. But certainly anything he may have done wrong is not underscored in the book of Job or given as any kind of an answer to the question of why he's suffering. He is not suffering because he's done anything wrong.

And therefore, the suggestion that the reason bad things happen to good people and that the simplistic answer that Christians give sometimes is that, well, there just aren't any good people. Well, that may be technically true, but it doesn't agree with the answer the book of Job gives. The book of Job certainly assumes there are such things as good

people, and Job is a case in point about as good as they get.

Another solution that some have offered, and this is that of Hinduism and Buddhism, is that reincarnation will settle all the inequities of life. And honestly, you have to respect this view among those who don't have any revelation from God otherwise, because the existence of reincarnation as a doctrine arises from nothing else than the consideration of this very point. Why do innocent people suffer? It's got to be answered some way.

Now, we who have the Christian revelation from Jesus, we know that there is a settling of the scores in the resurrection and that, you know, anything that we suffer that's unrequited in this life, there will be a settling of the scores and a balancing of the books in the resurrection. The Hindus don't know about the resurrection, so they came up with an alternate view that kind of is the same kind in principle, but just different in detail. They say, well, there's this phenomenon called karma, which is like moral credit.

And if you do good things, you accumulate good karma. If you do bad things, you accumulate bad karma. Now, some of the things, by the way, the events that happen to you, your circumstances, whether they're good or bad, are the payment you receive on your karmic debt.

If you have a lot of good karma, then good things will happen to you. If you have a lot of bad karma, that's bad credit, then you're going to suffer. Now, John Lennon believed in what he called instant karma, which meant that, you know, you will suffer right away for the things you do wrong.

Hinduism generally doesn't teach that. Hinduism teaches that many people don't suffer for what they do wrong. And this is the same observation that the biblical writers made and are trying to make sense of it.

Why is it that some that are wicked and exploiters and oppressors and they live comfortably and die happily? And other people are innocent or even righteous and they only do good, but they live in poverty and they get sick and they die miserably and so forth. Why is that? I mean, it's very clear that karma, if it exists, is not instant. It doesn't even always happen in this life.

And so the answer of Hinduism is reincarnation. That if you die with a surplus of good karma, which means that you have suffered more than you deserve, that you deserve better and you didn't get what you deserve yet, well, you'll get it in the next time around, the next cycle, the next incarnation. On the other hand, if you are a bad person and you never suffered for it, then you've got a surplus of bad karma to pay off in the next life.

And it's the following lifetimes that deal with these issues. And so one would say that the reason a person is suffering, though they appear to be good, is that they weren't good in

a previous lifetime. The suffering they're now going through is because the last time they were here, they died with a surplus of bad karma.

They were bad people who didn't ever get punished in their lifetime. So now they're punished in this lifetime for what they did in a previous lifetime. And that is why Hinduism has never really provided a convincing argument for showing compassion to people.

That is why when Mother Teresa came to Calcutta, a Hindu city, she, a Christian, and they Hindus, she found that nobody was caring for the lepers. No one was caring for the starving. The people who were lying in the streets dying, everyone just walked by and ignored them, except her.

And she started caring for them. And she lived in poverty and she lived a life of service and she never, I mean, she in some ways was rewarded because the whole world came to admire her, but lots of people might do it she didn't. No one ever noticed that she could have lived and died in obscurity and done that.

And yet, see, the reason is she had a Christian ethic. She did not believe in reincarnation. But the Hindus did.

They said, these lepers, they are paying off the bad karma of an evil life they lived before. Maybe they haven't done anything evil now in this life, but they did before and that's why this is happening to them. And you don't want to help them.

You don't want to relieve them because then the karma, the debt won't be paid. They have to go through this to settle the scores. If they don't go through it in this life, they'll have to come back and go through it next time.

So the most merciful thing you can do is ignore them. Do nothing for them. Let them get it off the books, this bad karma.

Let them pay off this debt. And so you can see that this idea of reincarnation is an attempt to make sense of what doesn't make sense, but it doesn't have good fruit. And Jesus spoke about those who are blessed because they suffer for righteousness' sake.

The idea of karma and reincarnation don't have any concept of suffering for righteousness' sake. You always suffer because you did something wrong, if not in this life, then in a previous one. But Jesus said people are blessed if they suffer for righteousness' sake.

It is possible to do the right thing and have no reason that you're suffering for it. But you're blessed anyway just because you were righteous. It's a blessing to be righteous even if you end up suffering in that state.

So these are kind of the answers that different kinds of religious philosophers give. Why do innocent people suffer? But the reasons that are suggested in the book of Job are very different than that. It's very clear in the book of Job that God is fully in control of the situation.

There's no other God or force or demiurge that is equal to him, overpowering him, overwhelming his will, working against his will. He is the one who is the giver and the taker of Job's prosperity. And he is doing it for a purpose.

The purpose of it is not clearly seen by Job or his friends. And it may even be missed by us. But we have an advantage that they don't have, and that is that we have chapters one and two.

We get a glimpse of what's going on in heaven before these things happen and what brings on these troubles. Job and his friends didn't see that or know it and maybe never learned it. Unless, of course, one of them is the author of the book, then of course, at some point they learned of this.

But it's possible Job never did find out the answer. But from the early chapters we can say several things about the suffering of Job and therefore of the righteous in general. One is that affliction plays a role as a test of a man's faith and loyalty.

That is obvious in these chapters. Job was not afflicted and then he came to be afflicted. Why? Because the devil wanted to see, the devil wanted to prove that the man's loyalty and faith had their limits.

At first thought the limits were rather low. He thought that Job would curse God if he just lost his property and his family. The devil was disappointed when Job didn't respond as he thought.

So he upped the stakes and made Job's physical condition miserable night and day with running pustules and itching and pain continually in his bones. He thought that would do it and that didn't do it either. Job did not break.

Job did not curse God or charge him foolishly. Now, we see then that Job passed a test and that's exactly what it was. It was a test.

And I believe that this is perhaps the primary answer that the book of Job gives us. And it's a helpful one. It tells us that God considers us to be in a testing mode.

That is, we are here to be tested. We're here to show our loyalty and to see if we can be moved from it. To see if we will trust that God is good even when it doesn't seem like it.

If we'll be loyal to him even when it doesn't look like he's being loyal to us. Will we, in other words, be disinterestedly loyal and faithful to God? Or are we only faithful to him

because things are going well? Now, this is the test of our hearts, of our motives. The testing of your faith, as James refers to it.

Actually, I guess it's in the King James version of the first Peter, chapter 1, 7, that the trial or the testing of your faith might be found, you know, as pure as gold eventually. Now, that is something that we learn from chapters 1 and 2 that Job maybe never learned. And they could not really imagine that it was so.

The second reason suggested by the book of Job is that suffering plays a role in character formation. This does not seem to be a main theme that is brought out very clearly in the book. But it is nonetheless something suggested by Job himself.

And that is in chapter 23 in verse 10. He says, But God knows the way that I take when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. Now, in a sense, this only is making the first point that that trials are a test of a man's character, his loyalty and so forth.

Because when you put gold into the furnace, it survives. And proves itself to be not dross, because dross cannot often be burned off in the furnace, but gold will survive it. And so in a sense, he's saying, I am gold and I'm being tested.

And when the test is over, I will still be found to be gold. I'm going to be still in. I'm going to still be the man that I was before.

I'm just going to still be loyal to God through this test. In a sense, that's just the first point I made. But there's another aspect that may be hinted at.

And that is that when gold goes through this testing, it also gets purified. The dross in it gets burned off. And although Job doesn't bring this out as clearly as some other parts of the Bible do, it certainly is part of the biblical teaching that our trials improve us ultimately.

They certainly reorient our perspective about what's important in life. They if we are the right stuff, they cause us to cry out to God and to see God as our only help at times. We wouldn't otherwise be forced to look to him that way.

There's all kinds of ways in which suffering in the Bible is said to improve us. One place that I would call your attention to this is in Psalm 119. There's a number of verses that that bring this up in Psalm 119, verse 67, Psalm 119, verse 67.

The psalmist says, Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I keep your word. Now, Job couldn't actually say that because he didn't go astray before he was afflicted.

But some people do. Most people go astray. And he says, This happened only before I was afflicted.

Since I've been afflicted, I've learned my lesson. And now I keep your word, the psalmist

says. And that's like the discipline of a child.

A child by nature is not usually obedient. They have their own willful agendas and they will test their parents resolve and their parents strength to, you know, to enforce the parents will. And when the child is disciplined, then he learns not to go astray.

This is the way God treats us, apparently, certainly. And that's the way we train children, too. In verse 75 of the same psalm, the same psalms, verse 75 says, I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

You've afflicted me because you're faithful to me and therefore, essentially, it's something because you see as being good for me. So we have this kind of teaching in the Old Testament and the new that suffering does shape character. It has a role in character formation.

It's not brought out in so many words in the book of Job, but it is seen nonetheless, because Job himself goes through personal improvement. Although he was a man who had not violated any of God's ethics before all this happened, there was still a bit of a little bit of. Oh, a sense of self-righteousness, perhaps that comes out in some of his speeches.

And yet at the end of all these dealings, he says to God, I have heard of you at the hearing of the year, but now my eye sees you and I loathe myself and I repent in dust and ashes. He was humble. And that's something that sometimes a righteous man needs.

It may be that pride may be the the last enemy to be defeated in a righteous man, a man who is who is actually living a righteous life often cannot help but compare that with the lives of others around him and feel kind of good about himself. And it seemed like Job may have felt that way. I'm not saying he had sinful pride, but just the same sense of self-contentment and and then didn't really see his own self as he later did through the trial.

So the trial seemed to have improved him. And perhaps the overarching message about the suffering of the innocent of Job is this, that suffering is often the price a righteous man pays for some higher good. And I would think the highest of being the glory of God.

And this is certainly true of Job. God's glory was, in a sense, being challenged by Satan. Satan was saying, there is no man that would serve you unless you paid him to do so.

Unless you took good care of him. God, you have to bribe people to love you. And this test was to demonstrate that that was not true, that God can be loved for who he is.

God can be honored and glorified by a man, regardless of what God pays back to the man. And Job's sufferings, it might seem hard on Job. He had to pay this price.

Why should he have to suffer for God's glory? Well, that's what every righteous person would be willing to do. Because every righteous person has one interest, and that is God's glory. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 30, he says, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.

That God to be glorified is the one concern of the person who's got right thoughts about God. And if there's something else that's more dominant in a person's thinking, then they're not quite really at the place that people are supposed to be at. The place where Job was proven to be, that he cared more about the glory of God.

And God was glorified. God was found to be one who could be worshipped without paying his servants to worship him. And so God was glorified through this.

And that's what James says. James says, you've seen the sufferings. You've seen the patience of Job and seen the end of the Lord.

The Lord is very merciful and gracious. See, God's character, God's goodness is affirmed through the book. And sometimes individual suffering of a righteous person may bring us some better good.

Certainly, we know this to be true, or at least we believe this to be true in cases of war, where a virtuous and courageous soldier, you know, gives up his life in order to, you know, bring about security for his folks at home and so forth, you know, to stop an oppressor. People who died fighting off Hitler, for example. I'm not saying that was a Christian thing to do or not.

I'm just saying that when people died, many of the people that were killed in that war who are trying to stop Hitler, they weren't even trying to save themselves or even their own homeland. They're fighting for people who lived across the ocean from them. But they felt there was a higher good that warranted their loss, their own loss of life and suffering and so forth.

We understand that in warfare. And we have to understand that life is a warfare. It's a spiritual warfare.

And it's a warfare between Satan's agenda and God's agenda. And we are soldiers and we endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus. Paul said in Timothy and 2nd Timothy 2, 3 and 4. And so suffering is the price we pay to bring about some good result.

The advance of the kingdom of God, the glory of God, whatever. We don't even know what our sufferings are going to accomplish. A lot of times we suffer and never really see a particular benefit that comes to us.

But what we don't know is that other people are inspired by our sufferings. Job had no idea how many generations would be inspired by his suffering. I mean, think of it for

4,000 years, people have been inspired by this man.

It helps people in their sufferings. He didn't receive any help in his. But the things he suffered brought about a much higher good for many other people.

And a lot of times our suffering is only going to help other people, not ourselves. And that should be that should be fine with us, if that's what pleases God. If God wants to bring aid to his children through the things that we suffer, so be it.

Paul certainly had that attitude and he mentions it in Colossians chapter one, where he talks about his sufferings that he goes through. In verse 24, Colossians 1, he says, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church. That is, I am suffering certain things, not for my sake, not because I'm going to benefit from it, but because the church will benefit from what I'm going through.

The sacrifices I'm making are going to benefit other people and I'm glad to do it, he says. And that is the attitude of a righteous man or woman. Now, just before we wind down this session, just talk about a few of the questions that remain about the book of Job, some of which may be difficult to answer with certainty.

One of them is, how did the author know about Satan's wager? That is, how did the author know what was going on in heaven here? I think the answer has to be somehow sought in the fact that there is divine revelation given to somebody, a later prophet, maybe Job himself, maybe Elihu, maybe who knows. But we have to say that it was by divine revelation. Unlike many of the stories in the Old Testament, which could have simply been written by someone who watched it happen, or even most of the book of Job, which could have been reported by a witness, but no one could have witnessed what went on in the first two chapters.

And there is that wager between Satan and God. And so that had to be given by divine revelation. We have to have a book here written by an inspired author.

Another question that's often come up is, did these guys really speak in poetry? I mean, were the speeches really given in poetic form? Now, some people say that it is possible that they did. And I think it is possible that they did. For one thing, these were wise men of the East.

Wise men, sages, often speak a little bit unnaturally. I mean, whether they're Eastern sages or Jewish sages or whatever, they often speak, well, they weigh their words, isn't they? Many of us just blurt out our thoughts. And the idea of putting it in poetry would be unthinkable.

We just don't have the time or the forethought in what we speak. Although the fact that we now have a phenomenon called freestyle rap indicates that there are people who just

off the top of their head can put their thoughts into rhyme, which is not the same thing as poetry here. But it is rather a form of poetry in our culture.

If you ever hear a freestyle rapper, he's allegedly coming up with something right off the top of his head. And some of them are pretty fast about it. So, you know, a highly intelligent man, if it was his desire to do so, could state his case just even spontaneously in a more memorable way than the average person could.

And if, in fact, wisdom sayings and wisdom speeches were conventionally offered in this kind of poetic form, then there are men who could do it. And these men may be among those who did. It's also important to note that they may not have spoken spontaneously.

We don't read of the passage of specific amounts of time, except for the first seven days. When they first saw Job, they were silent for seven days. It may be that while they were silent, they certainly were thinking something.

They were no doubt thinking, what do we make of this situation? And they might even in their own minds, maybe even writing down, but probably not writing down, probably in their own minds, just formulating some way they could express to Job their theories about this. And they could easily have time to formulate these in a poetic way. There could have even been time spent between the speeches.

You know, you often find that the speeches don't seem to take into account what the other speakers have said. Have you ever noticed that? You know, I mean, Zophar will say something and Job's answer won't necessarily be directly about it. Or more likely, Job will say something in the speeches the other guys give seem to ignore what he said and go a different direction.

It's possible they had all these speeches prepared beforehand. They knew what they wanted to say. And they had these prepared talks.

This could be seen as sort of a debate, although they didn't intend for it to be strictly a debate. I think they didn't expect Job to disagree with them. They seem to be upset with Job when he does disagree with them.

But did they speak in poetry? I think it's very possible they did. Although it's not absolutely necessary to assume so, because as I mentioned earlier, they could have spoken not in poetry and a later writer could have paraphrased what they said into a poetic form in order to create a poetic piece of literature. I don't know which of these is the case, but I'm kind of inclined to believe they did speak that way directly.

Another question is, where did Elihu come from? Three friends are mentioned at the beginning. They give all their talks and then suddenly Elihu starts talking. We've never been told about him previously.

And there's lots of different opinions people have about Elihu. Some think he is the voice of God, like maybe a prophet of God. Though I'm not really sure.

I mean, what he says sounds true, but it doesn't necessarily sound truer than the things that the friends said. I mean, his philosophy seems to be very similar to theirs, maybe a little different. Interestingly, when God finally speaks, he rebukes the three friends, but he doesn't make any reference to Elihu's speeches at all.

In fact, some people have had a theory of composition of the book that it came together in different sections at different times and that Elihu's speeches were added later and that they really didn't happen. But some writer, thinking the book of Job needed something like this, added those speeches later on. But I just feel that Elihu is probably, it says he's a younger man.

He'd remained silent. He probably didn't arrive with these others. He might have even been one of the servants of Job's household, an attendant, a young man who didn't see himself as having any right to speak in the situation until everyone else had exhausted their thoughts.

And he was full of the matter and wanted to say what he said. I don't know. But he is not said to have spoken wrongly of God, as the other three men had.

But neither is God. Does he confirm what Elihu said? He made something of a mystery. We'll have more to say about him when we come to his speeches.

Also, through what medium did God speak in the final chapters? Did God really have a booming voice audibly from the whirlwind? It's not impossible, but it's extremely rare for God to do something like that. And he did something like that at Mount Sinai. But that obviously was a highly significant event in history.

We don't have God frequently just booming out his voice and giving speeches audibly for men on Earth to hear. If, in fact, even at Sinai, God gave the Ten Commandments in that way, but he didn't give chapter after chapter of monologue to the people. If God really spoke audibly from the whirlwind, this is the only case in the Bible that we know of anything like this happening.

And, you know, it is possible that the speaking of God is to be understood more like, says God spoke out of the whirlwind and then he speaks to Job about nature and about animals and who takes care of these and who made the stars and all these things. These could be ways that God spoke to Job's heart through his contemplation of these things. I mean, after Job had finished speaking and he quieted down, it could be that God, there might have been a whirlwind over there and the power of that whirlwind, God used that to speak to Job's heart about these things.

We don't know if it was an audible voice. We're not told that it was. Or if it was, we might

say God spoke to me through such and such.

Solomon in one of his chapters in Proverbs says, I walked by the property of a lazy man and the wall was broken down and the place was overrun with thistles and weeds and the place was a mess. And he says, then wisdom came to me. Then I then I then I thought, you know, this is this.

So there's a lesson here, you know, a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hand, sleep and so shall your poverty come like an armed man. Now, this was he said wisdom came to him. He presumes it's from God and it came to him from contemplating a wall that was broken down and overrun with with weeds and so forth.

And it was like God spoke to him through that circumstance. It's possible that Job, after he quieted his heart and began to contemplate who made Orion's belt and who brings out the stars of the Pleiades and who, you know, who feeds the wild asses and and the conies and the and the dinosaurs and so forth, you know, that contemplating these things, you know, God's huge and I'm small. Who am I to be raising these questions? It's hard to say exactly, you know, if it came to him as an oracle, like like something that came to the prophets.

I don't think when the prophets received words from God, I don't think it was audible in their ears. I think it was God's spirit spoke to them. And they received the burden of the Lord or they received an oracle from God and Job may have received it like that, though, I mean, it's not impossible for God to speak audibly out of the whirlwind.

I don't know if we're if the poetic form of the book is entirely taken, if we're expected to take it entirely that way. Certainly, God spoke to Job, but whether it was a booming voice from the cloud, I don't know. Another question is, what did Job really do wrong? And when did he do it? Because he does get rebuked.

Job does get rebuked for speaking rashly, although in general, we are told that he spoke rightly of God. Yet not everything he said was right. And he did get rebuked and he had to repent in dust and ashes.

There's something about his attitude that's wrong. And you know what it was, I think, although it's not entirely clear, is that he he was courageous and responded well to all of his trials, except one. When he lost his possessions, when he lost his family and when he lost his health, those were hard blows for him, but he came through them OK.

When he was falsely accused, when his reputation as a godly man was challenged, this was he wasn't able to handle that as well. We might say, well, then he was a proud man, an egotistical man, maybe not exceptionally so. A man who has striven all his life to be righteous does feel greatly wronged when he is falsely accused of something.

And, you know, he doesn't have to be extremely proud in order to feel wronged. But he

did. That was something that he felt was the last straw, obviously.

And he he burst into invectives against his friends and so forth when they began to suggest that he was not as innocent as he thought or as he claimed to be. And that might be, you know, the breaking point, the loss of patience, in that case, may be what he had to repent of. And in what way did Job speak rightly of God, whereas his friends did not speak rightly of God? That's the final verdict of God in chapter 42, that Job spoke rightly of God and the friends did not.

Well, Job, a lot of things Job said were kind of the same things that his friends said, only in some cases, God seems to be accused by Job in ways that his friends do not accuse God. His friends talk about God as if God always does the right thing. And Job must be the one who did the wrong thing.

Job says, no, I didn't do a wrong thing. It seems that God's doing the wrong thing. In a way, it seems like Job's the one who's got the less excusable comments about God.

But on the other hand, his friends were speaking about God from a wooden theological orthodoxy that was not capable of dealing with the reality of God. They had a concept of God and they can be forgiven for that. They had no revelation from God.

They had deduced that God must always do good, must always reward good behavior and so forth. And therefore, their view of God, though a positive one, was not quite correct. They believed that one could figure out whether God was good by whether he did things that we thought were good.

If he does, if he rewards a good man, we think that's good. If he rewards, if he punishes a good man, that doesn't seem good to us. And therefore, God can't do that.

And therefore, they ruled that out. They didn't believe that God was as unpredictable as their theology made him out to be. I should say their theology may not be predictable, but the reality was he was unpredictable.

Job was wrestling with a broader theological concept. He said, I know these things you've told me. I know that it will go well for the righteous.

I know it's, you know, the wicked are going to be punished. But that just doesn't fit this case. God is doing something different here.

It doesn't seem just to me. And even though Job struggled with it and didn't even speak flatteringly of God on those cases, it almost felt like if he could just have his day in court with God, he could clear things up with God, like God wasn't really doing things, attending to things as he should. Yet he had more of a dynamic awareness of God and of God's being doing things outside the box, which was true.

God does act outside the box, apparently. And in Job's case was an instance. We'll have more to say about that box as we go through the speeches of his friends.

But another question we have to ask is what mistakes did his friends make as grief counselors? I mean, they came there, we're told in chapter two, verse one, and they came to comfort him. They were the opposite of comforters. They ended up being his accusers, and they made it his situation worse and more grievous.

Now, they meant well, but they failed. What can we learn about that? If someone's going through grief, there is a, you know, there are lessons to be learned here. I think the thing that they did wrong as grief counselors was that they assumed that their orthodox theological positions explained all reality.

And yet here was a thing in reality that didn't fit in the box of their theology. In their theology, good men will always have good things happen to them. Bad men will have bad things happen to them.

It'll never be otherwise. That was their theology. It was kind of good theology, but didn't fit all the facts of reality.

But they tried to force reality to fit into their theology, rather than being open to the possibility that their theology didn't understand everything correctly. And they might have to alter it by the facts. They had more loyalty to their theology than they had to their friends.

They couldn't hear his heart. They became entirely insensitive to him. They started making bold and insulting accusations against him.

It's almost like they forgot in the course of argument that he was in misery and that they'd come to try to make him feel better. Instead, they ended up heaping more pain and insult upon him. And this because they were loyal to their theological position and not caring about the man himself.

This is the same problem the Pharisees had in the days of Jesus. They were loyal to their Sabbath keeping. They were loyal to their traditions about washings.

They were loyal to their various ideas that they thought were theologically orthodox. And Jesus was breaking all the rules by acting like their ideas are not ultimate and that the needs of people actually matter more than their ideas do. And that's kind of the mistake that the counselors of Job made, I believe, also.

And by the way, when I used to read the book of Job, it seemed to me that it almost seemed unrealistic that these guys became so quickly like dogs attacking him, like hyenas attacking a wounded lion or something like that. I just thought people wouldn't act that way, especially friends wouldn't. That just isn't realistic.

And then something I went through in the past where I'm even in retrospect, years later, I still consider that I was innocent of what I went through. I had friends who just couldn't believe that I was innocent of it. And they just said this in their theology.

This kind of thing doesn't happen to someone who who did the right thing. And so they insisted I had done the wrong thing and they couldn't think of any wrong thing I had done, nor could I. But that their theology was inflexible and therefore, you know, they actually became as insulting to me in my grief as these guys were to Job. It was just astonishing to me.

I couldn't believe these were Christian men. And I thought, I can't believe that they have turned so quickly, who were friends, upon a friend without any evidence against him. I mean, they didn't have any evidence I'd done anything wrong, nor could I think of anything that I had done wrong.

And yet their theology said these things don't happen to a man unless he's done something to bring them on himself. It's the very same thing that Job's counselors thought. And it was these men were miserable counselors.

And by the way, I will say they all repented later. About a year later, they came to me and repented for that. But that was that made that made my hardship harder.

You know, it was hard enough alone. But then so I mean, that's why when I say the book of Job now, read it again. It's you know, I read it with a deeper level of appreciation because it's realistic to me.

It really is more realistic than it had been before. I went through some things I've been through since the last time I taught it. Well, real quickly, I need to give you a break.

Some of the main life lessons in Job that we'll see as we go through it are the sovereignty of God. God is in charge of everything that happens to us. That's very clear in Job.

We see something of the nature of spiritual warfare. What the devil's intentions are and what the devil's methods sometimes are. We see in Job the hiddenness of God's nearness during trials.

In trials, God seems far away, but God was very close by. Job was being watched by God and by Satan. In fact, all he was on display as a sense of which, as the next point here says, the human affairs are a spectator sport for the inhabitants of heaven.

That is, there's a contest going on on earth and there's spectators in heaven who are placing their bets on the outcome. Of course, the idea of the need for patience and faith under trial is a main idea in Job. Also, that human misunderstanding, false accusation and loss of reputation are part of the testing.

You see, Job did well up through most of the testing, and then when it came to his reputation, his innocence being challenged, so forth, that seemed to be the straw that broke the camel's back and caused the outpouring of bitterness and anger from him. But he can be forgiven for that. I mean, we've not been tested as much as he has been, but it does show that the test isn't over when the external circumstances have come and gone.

But even the false misunderstanding, the misunderstanding we experience, the alienation from people, even as a result, and the accusations we experience from them, those are part of the testing, too. We have to pass that part of the test as well. Also, it says in Hamlet, there are more things in heaven and earth, O Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.

And that certainly is a lesson from this book. The counselors of Job had a philosophy, and it was a neat little box, but there were some things that happened that don't fit in there. The story of Job did not fit into their philosophy, which was generally a good philosophy.

It was just a philosophy that's too generic to apply to every case, and not everything fits into the box of our theology. We're going to have our theological opinions about things. We have to be prepared to make them altered by reality, rather than trying to ignore reality or force it unnaturally into the opinions we already hold.

And the final point I think we should learn from this book is that a good man or woman's protestations of innocence should be taken at face value. Now, it's possible that a person will protest his innocence, and he's not, but we're talking about a good man here, a man who's got a reputation. He's got, you know, he's a man who's known as a man of integrity.

Now, events happen that make it raise suspicions about whether he's honest here, whether he's doing the right thing. But he keeps saying, I'm innocent. Now, you can trust him or not.

But his counselors made a mistake by not trusting him. You trust people or not based on what their character is. And even a man of good character might be misled or might mislead on occasion, but he won't generally do it on purpose.

And so, I mean, if a person's character is good, then if he protests his innocence, you should take that at face value. I had a phone call. I wouldn't give this, but I would.

I mean, we're running over time, but I just want to give this. I got a phone call from a caller on the air once, just a week or two ago, a woman who her husband had been accused of molesting her daughter. The daughter had accused him and he had denied it and it came to court.

And for whatever reasons, he confessed to the crime and went to jail. But he said he only

confessed to it to avoid certain complications of the trial. I don't know what they are and I don't know the man.

But the woman said that in all respects, he's a good man, seemingly an honest man. A good husband. And she said they went to several marriage counselors.

All the counselors believed he was innocent. And the fellow prisoners he spent 10 years in jail with believed he was innocent, which is kind of unusual because prisoners are pretty cynical about those kinds of things. And she, his wife, believed he was innocent, but her daughter was still claiming that it had happened.

And the mother was saying, you know, what do I do? You know, how do I deal with this? And I, you know, I don't know the guy. I don't know what to say about him. But I said, you know, well, the Bible says in the mouth of two or more witnesses, Shelby would be established.

I don't know why he confessed his guilt on an occasion when he before and afterwards said he was innocent, especially if he confessed his guilt, went to jail and did his time. Why would he then later protest his innocence? Why couldn't he just say, I did it. That was then.

This is now. I've done my time. But he continued to protest his innocence later.

I don't know what to think about it. But she said he's in all other respects, seems like a good man. I think, well, the Bible doesn't let you condemn a man on the witness of one.

So I said, I guess I wouldn't be able to say he was guilty if he's saying he's innocent. Now, he might be guilty, but I got an angry letter from another from another listener, a female about that call. And she said, you know, if you were a woman, I don't know if you would have given that same answer and so forth.

And this woman who wrote me said, you know, the man is certainly guilty. I thought, well, how does she know that? I mean, I know that sometimes men are accused wrongly of things and sometimes men are really guilty. But I don't know if a man has a good character in general and has never been known to be doing those things.

And an accusation made against him and he protested his innocence. I leave the judgment with God. I'm not going to say he's wrong against his own protestations unless there's proof.

And that's what Job's counselors should consider about him. You know, he had a reputation, a good man. But and he protested that he is innocent, but they wouldn't believe him just because their theology wouldn't allow that, which was their mistake, obviously.

And God later came to God's vindication, came to Job's vindication. Well, we've run over time, but we needed to finish our introduction before we get into chapter one. So we'll take a break and we'll come back to chapter one.