

The Book of Job:
A Window into a World
of Suffering and Faith, #3

The Innocent Sufferer
Job 1-3

--CEFC 1/21/17

"Catastrophic loss wreaks destruction like a massive flood.
It is unrelenting, unforgiving, and uncontrollable,
brutally erosive to body, mind, and spirit.
Sometimes loss does its damage instantly,
as if it were a flood resulting from a broken dam
that releases a great torrent of water,
sweeping away everything in its path.
Sometimes loss does its damage gradually,
as if it were a flood resulting from unceasing rain
that causes rivers and lakes to swell until they spill over their banks,
engulfing, saturating, and destroying whatever the water touches.
In either case, catastrophic loss leaves the landscape of one's life forever changed.
My experience was like a dam that broke.
In one moment I was overrun by a torrent of pain I did not expect."¹

So begins Whitworth University Theology Professor Jerry Sittser
in his book *A Grace Disguised*.

In this book Sittser tells the story of his life
after the car he was driving collided head-on with a drunk driver
and his wife, his mother and his daughter were all killed.
"In one moment my family as I had known and cherished it was obliterated," he wrote.
"Three generations—gone in an instant!"² //

As I stand here today, I feel distinctly unqualified to preach to you from the Book of Job.
Who am I to talk about the challenge to faith that comes from intense suffering.
I have lived a blessed life.

Sure, I have suffered loss—
I am now older than my father when he died of stomach cancer,
and my older brother was diagnosed with the same disease just one year later,
and he died at age 40.
Susan and I lost a premature stillborn baby, a little girl,
but I confess that she felt the trauma of that event more than I did.

Sure, I have my emotional ups and downs,
but my sufferings have been more of the vicarious kind—
as I have shared in the sufferings of others—

¹ Sittser, Jerry L.. *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* (Kindle Locations 206-212). Zondervan.

² Ibid., location, 212.

the sufferings of many of you.

I read the stories of people who have really suffered—
people like Jerry Sittser,
or like Joni Erickson,
who became a paraplegic after a diving accident in her teens.
She has lived practically her whole life in a wheelchair,
without the use of either her arms or legs.

Or I think of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor John Feinberg,
whose book is entitled, *When There Are No Easy Answers*.
In 1987, after 14 years of marriage and with three young boys at home,
his wife Pat was diagnosed with a rare disease
that causes a deterioration of the brain—
with both physical and mental devastation.
There is no treatment for the disease, much less a cure.
More than that, it is genetic—
and it is caused by a dominant gene—
which meant that there was a fifty percent chance that each of their boys
would also become its victims.

And they would not know if they had the gene
until the symptoms begin to appear
in their late 20s or early 30s.

Pat became progressively worse—
in 2001 she had to have a feeding tube put in,
in 2006 she could no longer be cared for at home
and needed to be put in a nursing home,
and for the last six years she has been unable to speak a word.
Feinberg writes about his experience with brutal honesty.

And I know of people among us today
who know something of that experience—
intense suffering,
emotional heartache,
pain that persists,
grief that leaves a lasting whole in one's life that will never be filled.
Some of you have experienced those times *When There Are No Easy Answers*.

What have I suffered compared to that?

And then there is Job.

The writer of the Book of Job wants us to see Job's suffering
as, in a sense, the most extreme case imaginable.
It is extreme both in the height from which he fell
and in the depths to which he descended,
magnified by the suddenness of it all.

He sets us up for the tragedy to come
 by first extolling Job for his godliness--
 This man Job "**was blameless and upright;**
he feared God and shunned evil," we are told (1:1).

And in what appears to follow from that,
 he describes Job's greatness--
"He had seven sons and three daughters,
and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels,
five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys,
and had a large number of servants.
He was the greatest man among all the people of the East."

But then, almost in an instant, it was all taken away—

1:13—"One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine
 at the oldest brother's house,
 14 a messenger came to Job and said,
 "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby,
 15 and 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!"
 Job 1:16 While 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!"
 Job 1:17 While 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!"
 Job 1:18 While 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,
 19 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,
and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

There is a comprehensiveness to this description—
 it involves human agents--
 raiders from the Sabeans and from the Chaldeans,
 and natural forces—
 lightning from a rainstorm,
 a mighty desert wind.
 The disasters strike from all four points of the compass—
 south, west, north, east.^{3/}

³ So Wilson.

"While he was still speaking," we read.

And again, "While he was still speaking,"
 And again, "While he was still speaking,"
 One blow of the hammer after another—
 bang, bang, bang--
 with no time to take it in,
 no time to adjust, to reflect, or even to pray.
 Each shock increasing in intensity—
 culminating in the death of all his children.
 All of the objects that symbolized God's blessing in his life
 were whisked away,
 as if by a thunderous tsunami.

"and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"--

"it is as if the life of [each] messenger is spared
 only so that Job can be told
 and his suffering made worse."⁴

Suddenly, Job, this great man, was reduced to nothing./

But this was not all—

On another day, we read in 2:7—
**"Satan went out from the presence of the LORD
 and afflicted Job with painful sores
 from the soles of his feet to the top of his head."**
 Not only are his great possessions carried away,
 not only are his children crushed,
 but his own body is ravaged by excruciating pain.

**"Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it
 as he sat among the ashes."**

This ash heap--that would be a burning dump outside the town,
 where, as one commentator imagined it:
 Job "sat, amid rubbish, rotting carcasses, playing urchins,
 homeless beggars, village idiots, and howling dogs."⁵
"among the ashes"--a place of isolation, physical hardship and social rejection.

What an ugly and pitiful sight.
 Job's friends, when they saw him from a distance, could hardly recognize him.

The image that comes to my mind
 is what the Allied troops must have seen
 when they first entered the Nazi death camps
 and looked upon the survivors' decimated bodies.

⁴ So Wilson.

⁵ So Wilson.

Here it is—suffering in its extreme.

Job is devastated in every area of his life—

Physically, his body is racked by painful sores.

Emotionally, he suffers the grief of the loss of all his children,

Socially, he is no longer the wealthy landowner

who sits in the place of honor in the community.

In fact, he will say later that

he was now mocked in song by the young men

and "**they do not hesitate to spit in my face**" (30:9-10).

Even his own wife, his own flesh and blood,

appears to have turned against him.

And then there was the spiritual suffering—

Where was his God in all this?

Job is suffering inexplicably—"for no reason" (2:3).

Job was innocent, he had done nothing to deserve this—

and, being privy to that exchange in heaven,

we know this to be true.

God himself admits it (2:3)!

Job suffers greatly.

Its magnitude is beyond anything we can imagine.

We are meant to resonate with the feelings of Job's friends,

who were speechless in the presence of such a pathetic and appalling figure—

2:13—"No one said a word to him,

because they saw how great his suffering was."

So how can any of us relate to Job?

We might be tempted to use him simply as a foil—

such a contrast as to diminish the significance of our own pain.

"You think you've got it bad?—

That's nothing—just look at Job!

So why don't you just quit complaining and buck up!"

But that wouldn't be right—

It wouldn't be right simply because suffering can't be quantified,

it can't be compared.

We all do it, of course—

when a tragedy occurs we talk about the number of people killed or injured,

the time spent in the hospital,

the severity of the abuse,

the inconveniences of the illness.

But we forget that suffering is personal;

it is very subjective;

and its intensity can't be computed

by somehow measuring the circumstances that cause it.

For those affected,

there may be no difference in the amount of suffering

caused by a terrorist attack that kills a hundred people,

and a heart attack that kills just one.

Yes, there are differences in degrees,
but the truth is, we all suffer—we all will suffer—
That's true for the simple reason
that every human relationship we enjoy and cherish
will one day be destroyed by death—
the death of the one we love or our own.

Jesus himself tells us that we will suffer—
"In this world you will have trouble," he says (Jn. 16:33).

Yes, Job's suffering is in the extreme—
but in the end, Job's struggles are just human struggles.
For everyone suffers—and each in a unique way.
Make no mistake—our suffering is real, and it is hard.

But there's something more going on here—
Job's struggles are not just human struggles;
they are also the struggles of the believer—
the man of woman of faith.
They are the struggles of God's own children.

Remember, Job is a godly man, a righteous man—
he was **blameless and upright**;
he **feared God and shunned evil**.
Job doesn't suffer in spite of his godliness,
No, he suffers because of it.
It is God who volunteers Job for this most hazardous assignment,
only because he knew Job to be the most capable soldier in his army.
Job was **God's esteemed servant**.

What we see in this book is not how God treats his enemies,
but how God treats his friends
(which is why, someone has suggested, he has so few of them!).

We all suffer—
so don't let the magnitude of Job's suffering
distance yourself from the message of this book.
For, in fact, this book is not really about how to deal with suffering at all;
it is about how we relate to God.

So how does Job relate to God in the midst of this incredible trial?
How does he respond to what happens to him?

Let's be clear that from the outset, Job is not unmoved by it all—
he is no Stoic
who simply takes it all in without emotion—
a passionless rock unmoved by the world.

No, Job is deeply grieved by his loss—
and he immediately enters into a state of mourning.

Every culture has its own way of recognizing death and its effects—
We here in America are rather sparse in this regard,
but we have our funeral customs--
people wear black,
they send flowers or notes of condolence,
they visit the bereaved and perhaps bring a casserole.
People will generally take some time off from work,
refraining from some usual entertainments as an expression of their grief.

Other cultures have much more elaborate rituals—
involving a period of relative isolation.
Some Jews observe a mourning period, called *shiva*,
for the seven days following the funeral,
modeled on Joseph mourning the death of his father Jacob for seven days.
In some cultures this lasts for as much as 40 days
before they are reintegrated into society.⁶

We see something of Job's grief in the ritual acts he performs—
When he first hears the news of disaster,
we read in 1:20 that "**Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.**"
Tearing one's clothes is a common sign of grief or even outrage in the Bible.⁷
Shaving the head has the same sense.⁸
Then in 2:8 we read that
"**Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it
as he sat among the ashes.**"

Sitting among the ashes—
that, too, is a ritual of grief—
dust and ashes are signs of death—
for it is to dust and ashes that we all return.⁹

And though most commentators think of Job scraping himself with broken pottery
as simply a physical reaction to the sores that covered his body,
as a means of trying to ease the pain,
I think a case can be made that this, too, is a ritual act—
a form of self-laceration,
reflecting the bodily losses he has sustained.¹⁰

In Jer. 48:37, for example,
the prophet speaks of the lamenting of the Moabites—

⁶ cf. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kidspirit/mourning-around-the-world_b_1542935.html

⁷ This can be found 16 times in the Bible.

⁸ cf., e.g., Isa. 15:2; Jer. 16:6; Ezek. 27:31; Amos 8:10; Mic. 1:16.

⁹ cf. 30:19—"He throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes."

¹⁰ On the ritual aspects of Job's actions, cf. David A. Lambert, "The Book of Job in Ritual Perspective," JBL, Vol. 134, No. 3 (Fall 2015), pp. 557-575.

**"Every head is shaved
and every beard cut off;
every hand is slashed
and every waist is covered with sackcloth."¹¹**

Job is engaging in the rituals of mourning,
and Job's friends in 2:12 will join with him—
When they saw him,
**"they began to weep aloud,
and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads.
Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights." /**

So Job is no Stoic—
he is not unmoved by his tragic circumstances.

But at the same time his initial reaction to all this
is clearly one of humble submission.

When he first received the mind-numbing news of one horrific event after another,
we read in 1:21 that **"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."
or, as it is often translated: "blessed be the name of the LORD."**

And again, after his body is afflicted with horrible sores,
in 2:9 we read of his wife almost taunting him—

**"Are you still holding on to your integrity?
Curse God and die!"**

"Why go on with this torture?

Just put an end to it!"

It's as if she can't stand to see her husband suffer any longer.

But Job will have none of it--

"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" he says (2:10). //

Wow!

Such faith!—

What more could you possibly want from someone in such circumstances?

This is piety in its purest form—

"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

**"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
blessed be the name of the LORD."**

¹¹ cf. also, Jer. 16:6; 41:5; 47:5. But cf. Deut. 14:1—"You are the children of the LORD your God. Do not cut yourselves or **shave** the front of your heads for the dead,"

What unwavering devotion to God!
What humble submission to God's will!
Job is a model believer—
"In all this, Job did not sin in what he said."

What an inspiration Job is!

Certainly he inspired Matt Redmond,
who wrote the song we've just sung—

**Blessed Be Your Name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow
Blessed be Your name**

**Blessed Be Your name
When I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed Be Your name**

**Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be'
Blessed be Your name**

**Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name**

**Every blessing You pour out I'll
Turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say,
Blessed be the name of the Lord!
Blessed be Your glorious name!**

That's a wonderful song—
I love that song!

And that's the song on Job's lips
in the midst of the most extreme form of suffering we could ever imagine.

Thank you Job, for your encouragement;
Thank you, Job for your uplifting inspiration.

The book could end right there,
and we would extol its lofty message.
Job has passed the test of faith;

God can be worshipped apart from his blessings.
Take that, Satan!
Game over!

But, of course, the problem is, the book doesn't end right there.
Far from it.

At the end of chap. two, Job's three friends show up
to sympathize with him and to comfort him.
They sat on the ground with him and seven days and seven nights
without saying a word.

But then we read in 3:1--
"After this, Job opened his mouth,"
and what comes out of it is not at all what we expect--
instead of pious praise come words of bitter cursing--
"Job opened his mouth, and cursed the day of his birth."

Job engages in what one writer called,
"a retrospective contraceptive wish applied to his own existence."¹²
In other words,
Job wishes he had never been born.

"May the day of my birth perish,
and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'
4 That day—may it turn to darkness;
may God above not care about it;
may no light shine upon it.
5 May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more;
may a cloud settle over it;
may blackness overwhelm its light.
6 That night—may thick darkness seize it;
may it not be included among the days of the year
nor be entered in any of the months."

Of course, in seeking to rewrite the past,
Job is asking for something that is impossible—
this is a cry of the heart,
expressing his extreme frustration with his condition,
and the disorder he is experiencing.
This is not the way life is supposed to be.

As one writer put it:
"Job's cry is a bitter irony,
a perverse upside-down version of Happy Birthday to Me."¹³ /

And if his birth couldn't have been prevented,

¹² Ash, 74.

¹³ Daniel Simundson, cited in Wilson.

why couldn't he at least have experienced an early death—
v. 11--"Why did I not perish at birth,
and die as I came from the womb? . . .
13 For now I would be lying down in peace;
I would be asleep and at rest."

v. 16 "Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child,
like an infant who never saw the light of day?
17 There the wicked cease from turmoil,
and there the weary are at rest."

Why? Why? Why?
The question haunts him in his anguish.

"Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul,
21 to those who long for death that does not come,
who search for it more than for hidden treasure,
22 who are filled with gladness and rejoice
when they reach the grave?
23 Why is life given to a man
whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?"
For sighing comes to me instead of food;
my groans pour out like water.
25 What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
26 I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil." //

Wait a minute!
This is not the glowing testimony of faith that we want to hear.
What happened to that pious Job,
that patient Job,
that Job who was able to praise God
even in the midst of his tears?

This is a protesting Job.
And, as we shall see, it gets worse—much worse—
and Job will appear, at times, disrespectful, impertinent,
even brazen and brash in the way he deals with God.

What happened?
We can only surmise that reality has sunk in.

Job's initial response to his suffering was good and right—
It is what you would expect from Job, the godly man that he is—
It is what he had been trained to say,
and he was trained to say it because it was true.
"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;

blessed be the name of the LORD."

But those words of pious truth
were not the truth that he was now experiencing.
The flood waters have receded,
and he is now surveying the full extent of the damage.
Job is overwhelmed by it all,
He is agitated and agonizing;
and he longs for rest—
which in the Bible speaks of that divine order—
the world as it is supposed to be—
as when God rested from his work on the seventh day.

The initial flash of light that Job experiences
quickly fades, and a deep darkness sets in—
a dark night of the soul.
In chap. 3 we see how he is really feeling—
he is in anguish at what he is going through.
He is torn up inside.
And who wouldn't be?
These are words of deep lament,
or as one writer describes it,
this chapter is "a spine-chilling howl of despair."¹⁴

You may be shocked at such language,
but you shouldn't be.

Part of our concern may simply come from our own cultural vantage point—
particularly those of us with a northern European heritage.
We tend to prize emotional restraint,
a stiff-upper lip,
always remaining cool, calm, and collected.
Emotional outbursts of any kind tend to make us nervous.

Job's words certainly challenge what Francis Anderson calls
"the bourgeois etiquette
that has dominated the mores of western Christendom,
especially in the Puritan tradition."
That, he argues, is "no guide to the rightness of Job's speech.
Self-control is something quite different from not showing one's emotions...
The Lord's testing is not to find out if Job can sit unmoved like a piece of wood."¹⁵

Job laments, and he laments boldly.
And as we read our Bible, Job is not alone in voicing words of lament—
We quite often see passionate expressions grief and sorrow in the Psalms.

¹⁴ ??, Cited in Wilson.

¹⁵ Pp. 100f.

We read one of them in our call to worship—Psalm 38.

Psalm 38 is a Psalm of David, but it could just as well have come from Job—
Psa. 38:5—"My wounds fester and are loathsome . . .

6 I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.
7 My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.
8 I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart."

Even more to the point,

I think of the lament of the prophet Jeremiah—
Jer. 20:14—"Cursed be the day I was born!

May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!
20:15 Cursed be the man who brought my father the news,
who made him very glad, saying,
"A child is born to you—a son!" . . .
20:18 Why did I ever come out of the womb
to see trouble and sorrow
and to end my days in shame?"

In fact, the Old Testament has a whole book of lament, called Lamentations—
grieving the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Even in the New Testament we see evidences of the agony of life in this fallen world.

In another passage we read earlier, from 2 Cor. 1, Paul says,

"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers,
about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.
We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure,
so that we despaired even of life.
Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death."

Later in that letter, he says,

"I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart
and with many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4).

And in Romans he writes:

Rom. 8:22 "We know that the whole creation has been groaning
as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.
23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,
groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons,
the redemption of our bodies."

And didn't Jesus himself, in his sharing of our human experience,
feel that same agony?

He weeps at the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

We read that "he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (11:33).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, he lamented,

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mt. 26:38),

and he prayed "**in anguish**,"
and his sweat was like drops of blood (Lk 22:44).

And on the cross, there we hear those most harrowing words of grief,
when the full weight of the fallenness of this world
falls upon his shoulders:
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This is reality—Jesus, the ultimate innocent sufferer,
wrestling with God at the moment of his greatest test of faith.

In chap. 3, the patient Job becomes the protesting Job.

No, we shouldn't be surprised at Job's changing mood.
I think of the nineteenth-century theologian Robert Dabney.
In a matter of about a month, in two separate incidents,
he lost two of his sons, Jimmy and Bobby.¹⁶

He wrote this in a letter:

"When my Jimmy died, the grief was painfully sharp,
but the actings of faith, the embracing of consolation,
and all the cheering truths which ministered comfort to me
were just as vivid."

Here Dabney shares the experience of the "patient Job"—
"Blessed be the name of the Lord."

But Dabney continues in the same letter,
"But when the stroke was repeated, and thereby doubled,
I seem to be paralyzed and stunned.
I know that my loss is doubled,
and I know also that the same cheering truths
apply to the second as to the first,
but I remain numb, downcast, almost with hope and interest."¹⁷

Jerry Sittser writes, similarly: "I felt punished by simply being alive
and thought death would bring welcomed relief."¹⁸

This is the Job of chap. 3—the protesting Job.
Here is Job in the depths of despair,
lamenting the agony of the life that he was now living,
cursing the day of his birth. /

But note well—
Job does not curse God, and he won't.

¹⁶ He had six sons altogether, three of whom died in childhood of diphtheria.

¹⁷ Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, cited in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds. p. 179.

¹⁸ *A Grace Disguised* (Kindle Locations 256-257).

Nor does he consider suicide—
that would unacceptable to a person of faith,
an ultimate denial of all hope in God.

Job never goes there—
but he grieves,
he laments,
he protests the way he is being treated—
and he does so boldly, almost brazenly,
but he never curses God.

He never denies God's goodness,
or his worthiness to be worshiped,
He never treats God as his enemy.
In fact, it is Job's conviction that God is good and that God is just
that creates this crisis of faith in the first place.

We'll have much more to say about Job's response to God as we go on,
but let me share one thought
that may provide a clue to where this is going—
it was suggested to me by my son.¹⁹

Look back at Job's interaction with his wife, Mrs. Job, in 2:9.
She appears to act as a tempter,
when she says, "**Are you still holding on to your integrity?
Curse God and die!**"
That's exactly what Satan wants him to do.
But Job resists, "**You are talking like a foolish woman.**"

Notice, he says "like" a foolish woman.
He knows she's not a foolish woman—
This is Job's wife, after all—
Job would never have married a fool.

But in speaking to him as she does,
she is not acting toward him in a way that reflects who he knows she really is.
There is a discrepancy between what he knows to be true about her,
and the way she is acting toward him.

And isn't that Job's problem with God.
How can he go on trusting the God who is acting toward him
in a way that is so contrary to the character Job knows him to have?
He knows God to be good and just,
so how could he be treating him as if he were a cruel and unjust God?
That's his struggle,
and that struggle is a sign of his faith, and of his hope—
for he never gives up his conviction that God is good and just.

That's why he asks "Why?" in the first place.

¹⁹ See his "Mrs. Job Reconsidered" (forthcoming?).

In the end, Job's "Why?" is never answered,
but he is still commended by God as one who has spoken rightly.

There is much more to come in this book—
and that itself says to us that grief is a process—
Job can't snap out of his lament in a moment.
It will take time, and it won't be easy.
And we will see that his three "friends" won't make it any easier.

In this process of grief, we must work through the pain,
and we must be honest with ourselves,
and honest with God—
and be assured, he can take it.

There is a certain stream within the broader Christian church
that has no place for sorrow or lament.
Some call it a clap-happy Christianity.
The only emoji allowed is a smiley face.

Unfortunately, this attitude only doubles people's pain,
for now their sorrow is compounded by guilt—
They reproach themselves for not being able somehow to rise above it all,
and to shake off their gloomy feelings
and to be joyful and full of praise.
Isn't that what true believers do?
Job tells us otherwise.

In its depiction of our human experience of faith and trust
in the face of the mysterious ways of God,
the book of Job is very realistic about the struggle we all face
in a world in which we will all suffer.

That's important,
for in the end, a relationship—a real relationship—
requires that it be the real you relating to the real God.

So if that's true, what are we to make of that song we just sang—

**Blessed Be Your name
When I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed Be Your name**

**Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name**

Every blessing You pour out I'll
Turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say, "Blessed be your name."

Can you sing that?
Can you sing that even when you don't feel like it—
even when you are struggling with God, like Job was?
even when those words may ring hollow in your heart?

I think you can—
for I will admit there are many times when I sing the words of songs
that are far above my experience.
It may be hard, but I sing them anyway.

For I consider them songs of aspiration—
almost prayers—
In my head I say,
Lord, help me to experience what I am singing right now—
Work in me so that this becomes true in my heart,
for in my heart of hearts, I know they speak truth.

**Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name.**

Job still has a long way to go,
but he won't give up—
we shouldn't either.

Prayer—

Matt. 5:3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Matt. 11:28 **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.**

Closing Song: #347 *Be Still My Soul*

This is a song that you sing to yourself—
an exhortation to trust in the God who is
and in the end will be proved
worthy of that trust.

Benediction:

to God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,
who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light,
whom no one has seen or can see--
to him be honor and might forever. Amen.

The Book of Job:
A Window into a World
of Suffering and Faith, #3
1/21/17

The Innocent Sufferer **Job 1-3**

What happens when the lights go out and all around you is nothing but darkness and gloom? This is the story of the great and godly Job who is reduced to nothing, suffering alone on an ash heap. His story is one that haunts us and challenges us, and calls us to a new level of faith.

I. Job Suffers Greatly

*"No one said a word to him, because they saw
how great his suffering was." (2:13)*

II. Job Responds Submissively

*"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord!" (1:21)*

III. Job Protests Boldly

*"After this, Job opened his mouth
and cursed the day of his birth." (3:1)*

Mrs. Job and Job's Bewilderment

*Pious Praise, Lament
and the Human Experience*

Sermon Discussion:

**The Innocent Sufferer
Job 1-3**

- When you hear some story of horrific suffering, how are you most likely to respond?:
 - a) I'm glad that didn't happen to me!
 - b) What did they do to deserve that?
 - c) Where was God in all that?
 - d) How can they possibly cope?
- Would the book of Job be better if it ended with chap. 2? Why must it go on?
- Have you ever experienced a time when your faith was tested? What was most difficult about it?
- Do you find fault in the way Job responds to his suffering in Job 3? Should you?
- Is there a place for lament in the life of the Christian? Why or Why not? How do you deal with the many psalms in which lament is so prominent?
- Do you sing songs in worship that are beyond or higher than your experience? Is that hypocritical? How can that be helpful?