

**Women's Bible Study – Fall 2017**  
**Why Did this Happen to Me ~ Job 1:1-12**  
**September 20 ~ Svea Merry**



Why Are We Studying Job and 1 Peter?

A highlight of my summer was a trip we took with our four teenagers to Colorado. My goal for the trip was to engage the kids in outdoorsy activities that would excite them and keep them off their phones. I ran all kinds of ideas by them as we planned for the trip, and much to my chagrin, the activity they got the most excited about was going whitewater rafting. I've never done anything like that before, mostly because the idea of careening down a river filled with dangerously cold water rushing swiftly over skull-cracking boulders doesn't really fit with my idea of a relaxing vacation. However, I have just enough thrill-seeking tendencies left from my pre-mom days that I went with it and signed us up for a one-day whitewater rafting trip. Now, I have to tell you, as we drove to the river that morning, I was nauseous with dread. I'm not sure if I was more scared for my safety or for that of my family. I hate being in situations where I feel out of control, and I was feeling like a complete fool for actually paying to put my family in a dangerous situation. But everything got a bit better when we arrived and I learned two things: first, the guide that would take us down the river was an incredibly experienced woman from Latvia who spends her whole year going from country to country guiding whitewater expeditions. She had just returned from Zimbabwe where she'd been running the Zambezi River the week before, and after she spent June in Colorado, she was off to somewhere in South America. It was obvious this woman had the knowledge, skills, and experience to get us through our trip successfully. But also, I was reassured to find out that before we ever put our raft into the water, our guide would spend the whole first hour of our day training us for what to do in virtually any situation we might face. We practiced what to do if someone dropped a paddle, what to do if we got caught on a rock, and heaven forbid, what to do if we fell out of the boat into the icy water. My heart was racing when we shoved off, but I calmed down a lot after we'd made it through our first rapids or two and things happened the way our guide had told us they would. It was a surreal experience to be in that raft, hurtling towards waterfalls and boulders, and actually finding it to be an amazing family bonding experience rather than a nightmare.

My point in sharing this with you is much greater than an excuse to show you my most recent favorite family picture. The same reasons why our whitewater rapids trip turned out well are the same reasons why I'm excited that we're studying the topic of suffering through Job and 1 Peter this fall. What transformed my whitewater rapids experience from being traumatic to thrilling was the presence of our competent guide, and the preparation that we spent learning how to handle the situations we were about to face.

Like the hour of training we received before we headed down the river, the first reason we are studying Job and 1 Peter this fall is to gain skills and prepare for the trials ahead. This is a chance to learn and to prepare so that when, not if, but when you find yourself careening towards a rocky section of the river, you're ready for it. Or maybe you're already in a whitewater chapter of life. In that case, I hope this study will come to your aid like someone who has heard your cries for help and has a life-ring to throw to you.

The truths we'll be studying this fall in Job and 1 Peter can help you get your head back above the water and let you breathe again.

But the second, and even more important, reason we are studying Job and 1 Peter is to come to know and trust God. One of the best things we'll see in the book of Job is that we have an even more amazing guide in our boat than the exotic Latvian lady I met last June. God at the helm of our lives. The God who is most capable, most competent, most able to get us through the rapids alive. But also one who, like my rafting guide did in order to give our family an experience we'd never forget, might actually steer us towards rocks and waterfalls for His purposes.

So why does God do that? Why doesn't He just let us live our lives in peace? Why wouldn't He protect us from situations that threaten to hurt us so badly? And why do we so often see good people suffer in ways it seems they just don't deserve?

Do you hear all those "why's"? Isn't "why" the word that most often comes to mind when we or someone we love is suffering? That's why, as you can see on your outline, I'm approaching this message this morning by attempting to answer a series of why questions.

Let's turn to

### Why is Job Relevant for Us?

So, why is it? Is it because this man named Job suffered perfectly and if we just copy everything he did we'll be fine? No. While on the whole we'll see him to be a godly man, he too will have his good moments and his bad, and suffering will drive him to desperation just like the rest of us normal humans. Is it because Job's experience is so relatable to our everyday lives? Hopefully not!

Here's why Job is relevant for us: the book of Job deals with how we view God given the reality of suffering. To put it into the phrase we're using for Women's Bible Study this fall, Job is relevant because it helps us learn how to relate to God when life stinks.

Before we wade into this incredible book, let me give you some background and context that will help you navigate your way through it. First, the who, what, where, when details.

**Who** wrote Job? Not sure. An obvious answer would be Job himself, but the author is never identified in the Bible. Because of the masterful poetry that makes up most of the book, it was clearly an intelligent and educated author, some have even suggested it could have been Moses, but we just don't know. And I kind of like that we don't know because I think that contributes to the truth that suffering is a universal experience common to all of us.

**When** was Job written? Well, I'm sorry to say we don't really know that either. You may have heard that Job is the oldest book in the Bible. Not the story which occurred first, obviously the stories in Genesis with its account of creation happened first, but some scholars believe Job may have been written even before Moses wrote Genesis through Deuteronomy. It's commonly thought that Job may have lived in the era of the Patriarchs, in other words, lived around the same time as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and

Joseph, because there isn't any reference in the book to the Law or any temple practices that were ushered in with Moses's era. However, other scholars think this book was written much later, perhaps even after the exile because certain verses sure appear to quote other Scripture, particularly the Psalms. The book's lack of references to the Law and Israelite temple practices could simply be explained because, as we'll see in a minute, Job didn't live with the Israelites. We do know Job was written by the 6th Century BC because the book of Ezekiel mentions Job along with Noah and Daniel as pillars of the faith. So Ezekiel either knew Job or knew this book by his time. Ultimately, though, when this book was written doesn't matter much because its content is absolutely timeless.

**Where** this story of Job takes place is kind of interesting. We actually do know this one. We'll see in verse 1 that Job lived in the land of Uz. Isn't that fascinating??? OK, here's why that's fascinating. Uz was not anywhere in the Promised Land or in any of the places the Israelites ever lived. Scholars think Uz was located near Edom, and you Old Testament lovers will recall that Edom was where Jacob's less-respected brother Esau settled. But here's what makes this cool. This means that Job was known to God and loved by God even though he wasn't part of, or at least with, God's chosen people. This shows God's presence with people who may feel like they are isolated from the normal crowd. I'm thinking of people like missionaries who serve where there are no churches or other Christians, or closer to home, the elderly or those who suffer from conditions which don't allow them to participate in regular church fellowship. These people are not forgotten by God. Quite the contrary, Job's distinctness as a God-follower despite not being with God's people reminds us that God is with us anywhere.

The **what** of Job is this: for the most part, it's a book of poetry. Job is the sixth longest book of the Bible with its 42 chapters, and all but 2.5 of those chapters are poetry. The first two chapters are written in normal story form narrative prose, but then from chapters 3 until the second half of the last chapter, chapter 42, it is all people expressing themselves poetically. And I love this because how cool is it that the book in the Bible that focuses on human suffering is expressed through the most emotive form of writing. The poetry of Job transports us into a place of deep expression, and like the psalms, offers an outlet for our deep feelings about life and God.

Despite its length and poetry, Job is a pretty easy book to navigate when you discover that it has a very orderly pattern to it. Chapters 1 and 2 tell the story of everything bad that happened Job and why, and then the rest of the book is alternating patterns of Job talking with 5 other people: his three friends, a priest, and ultimately, God.

This graphic is kind of a helpful way to see the flow of the book. Each of the 6 characters in the book are represented here by a color and where they speak in the book. The book starts with Job, God, and the Satan character, shown here in red, black, and purple, and from there, it launches into about 30 chapters of alternating discussions with Job and each of his three friends in turn. Then from chapters 32–37 we get a speech from the young priest, Elihu (in green), and finally, in chapter 38, God shows up again with a lot to say. We get a couple of respectful responses from Job, and then God finishes the story.

I stole this idea and drew a colored bar on the side of each page so I can tell at a second's glance who is speaking. It's not necessary for you to do this for the purposes of our study, but I'll throw out the suggestion in case you find it helpful.

Well, let's jump in and see if we can find an answer to our next question:

### Why Did God Let Bad Things Happen To Job?

Open your Bibles to Job chapter 1, if you haven't already, and let's see what we can learn from this amazing book. Job is an easy book to find. Psalms is pretty much in the middle of the Bible, and Job comes right before Psalms. We'll read verses 1–5 and get to know this man who I know will become dear to us over the next few weeks.

*There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. <sup>2</sup>There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. <sup>3</sup>He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. <sup>4</sup>His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup>And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.*

So what do we learn about Job from these verses? We already talked a bit about the fact that Job lived in Uz, a place that wasn't with the rest of God's people. But verse 1 says something even more surprising than that. It calls him blameless and upright. Now how could this be? Does this strike anyone as sounding like a bit of an exaggeration? After all, we all know that the only person to have ever lived who was truly perfect was our Lord Jesus Christ, so what does this mean? Well, it doesn't mean that Job was sinless. He was a fallen human like the rest of us. The Hebrew word used here for "blameless" means to have integrity. This means Job was known as a man of his word. He spoke the truth. He was the kind of guy who owned his mistakes and took responsibility for his actions. In this sense, he was blameless and upright. That's going to be important to remember as we go through this book, because his integrity will be called into question. Interesting trivia: can you recall what other man in the Old Testament was called blameless? Noah. Genesis 6:9 said Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Which like Job, was exactly the same reason why God singled him out for a pretty challenging chapter of life.

Verse 1 also says Job feared God. This doesn't necessarily mean Job was afraid of God, this kind of fear means to show profound respect. He had great reverence for God. Although, if you've read to the end of this book, you'll know that Job probably felt actual fear of God when all was said and done too. God is more powerful than we can imagine and to be in the presence of that kind of power would be frightening for anyone.

Finally, still from verse 1, I love that it says Job turned away from evil. Think about that. If you turn away from evil, you are actively acknowledging it and moving yourself away

from it. That's important, isn't it? So often we think we are doing well if we don't slip into sin, but this is actively removing yourself from any situation which could be a temptation towards sin. We get an example of this in a later chapter of Job. In 31:1 Job says he made a covenant with his eyes to not even look at a young woman inappropriately demonstrating his commitment to purity. Job took sin seriously. He didn't flirt with evil, but actively avoided being in a bad situation. Aren't you intrigued with this guy? And that's just the first verse.

Next we find out that Job was extraordinarily successful in other ways too. Verse two tells us he was blessed with 7 sons and 3 daughters. Now, we may hear that and just think, wow, big family. But to the original readers of this, having 7 sons would have jumped off the page as proof of blessing. Elsewhere in the Bible, Naomi describes Ruth as being more valuable to her than 7 sons (Ruth 4:15), and in Hannah's beautiful prayer she says "the barren woman has borne seven" (2 Sam 2:5). To have 7 sons was essentially to have a perfect number, but what could be even better? To have three daughters, and  $7+3=10$  and 10 is also a number in the Bible having the implication of perfect completeness. So, basically, Job had the perfect family.

Verse 3 describes his incredible wealth. It's hard for us to appreciate someone's wealth measured by the fact that he owned 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 pairs of oxen, and 500 donkeys so I tried to research what Job may have been worth in today's dollars. Well, the numbers were all over the place but every single estimate I saw put Job's worth in the millions of dollars, most of them estimating him to be worth at least \$5 million and going up from there. Job was a very rich man.

The next thing we learn about Job was that he was a man who was very concerned that his family was right with God. Verse 4 says his sons would have a feast in their homes on their day, probably meaning their birthday, and they'd invite their sisters to come and eat and drink with them. That might sound a bit funny, but it's good stuff. These brothers loved to celebrate together as a family and inviting their sisters affirms these siblings were very close and connected. But in verse 5 we see that after each of these grand parties, Job would send for his kids and give a burnt offering in case his children had sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Now, understanding the language makes this not sound quite as weird as it might in English. Typically in the Old Testament, the word curse does not mean anything like a spell a witch might cast with the eye of newt and the hair off a bald man's back. In the Old Testament a curse is the opposite of a blessing. For example, after God gave Moses the Law, in Deuteronomy 28 He spelled out the blessings for following the law and the curses for disobeying it. In this case here in Job, to curse God in one's heart would be the opposite of blessing God. You know like "Bless the Lord, O my soul." How do we bless the Lord? We could probably boil that down to showing honor in God in what we say and do. So to curse God would be to do something which dishonors Him. Job so reveres God that the idea that his children may do something that dishonors God moves him to offer a costly sacrifice for each of them. This is amazing parenting. Picture Job gathering his family together, saying, "I love you all so deeply, and I love God above all, so we are here to offer this sacrifice to show our sincere desire to honor Him even if we have done something inadvertently that was less than a blessing to Him." And this apparently wasn't just something that Job did once. The last thing we learn about him

from this paragraph is that he did this continually. This kind of lifting his family up in full sincerity before God was his regular habit.

These first 5 verses establish the first of three facts that lays the foundation for the rest of the book: *Fact #1: Job was a man of good character who had deep faith in God.*

But as you likely already know, Job's happy life will soon end, and many of us will struggle to watch someone who has been a good and honorable person suffer horribly. So often when we see a dear person suffer in a way that seems so unfair, what do we want to know? WHY? Well, amazingly, we're about to find out exactly why Job is going to suffer. Let's read verses 6–12, and just to warn you, it's gonna get weird here, but we'll comb through some of the tangles in a minute.

*6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. 7 The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 8 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" 9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." 12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.*

Now, if you're like me, the first couple of times you read that story, you have questions all over the place, like "Why is God letting Satan anywhere near Him let alone making deals with him?" and "Why in the world would God let Satan do such awful things?" and maybe underlying it all, "Why would God offer a good man like Job over to be harmed?" I mean, it makes you a bit disillusioned if you think this is how God treats His friends, right?

Well, the point of that is actually the point of the whole book of Job. Stick with me and we'll get there. But first, let's tackle some of those other questions.

Let's talk about this Satan character. Before we go any further, you may be interested to know that the Satan mentioned here may or may not be the Satan talked about in the New Testament. We can't tell it from our English Bibles, but in the original Hebrew, Satan is not a name, it's a title. The word Satan means "the adversary" or "the challenger" or "the accuser" and scholars today disagree over whether the character here is the same one we think of as the devil, or some other spiritual being presenting a challenge to faith in God. Some people prefer this, because Christians often give Satan more credit than he is due. However, whether this is the traditional Satan, or some other character presenting a hypothetical challenge to God doesn't change the second fact we learn from our passage today:

*Fact #2: Those who oppose God seek to destroy faith in Him*

Let's look at this opposition to God. What do we see the accuser character doing? What does he say when God asks, "From where have you come?" Now, it's not like God doesn't know, He knows everything, right? This echoes the scene in the Garden of Eden when right after Adam and Eve have sinned and hide from God, God asks, "Where are you?" or like when you see a toddler who was told he couldn't have a cookie with chocolate chips smeared all over around his mouth and you say, "What have you been eating?" These are not questions which seek knowledge. These are questions demanding that the guilty fess up to their actions. God is driving Satan to acknowledge that he has been roaming the earth looking for trouble.

But then it gets weird. What we probably all wish God did here would have been to pound a gigantic judge's gavel down, sending a shockwave through the universe, and pronounce Satan guilty and lock him up forever. But He didn't. Instead God does what the almost unthinkable! He actually feeds Satan an opportunity by seemingly handing over this sweet man Job into the accuser's malevolent hands.

Why in the world would God treat a good man like this? Well, it's Satan who gives us the answer in verses 9–11. Let's look at that again. *<sup>9</sup>Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup>Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup>But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."*

The accuser's claim is that Job only loves God because he's had a great life. He's got the perfect family, he's well regarded, and he's filthy rich. And apparently God had a hand in that by placing a metaphorical hedge of protection around Job to prevent bad things from happening to him up to this point.

But what is Satan's point? Think about this. Because this sets up the whole point of the book. Satan's point is that Job, and by extension humanity, only loves God because of His blessings. Satan is convinced he can destroy Job's faith if the blessings disappear and suffering overwhelms. The accuser's goal is to destroy faith in God, and his tactic is to convince us that God is good when life is good, and to cause us to question God and our faith in Him when life stinks.

And let's be honest with ourselves for a minute. This is a really good strategy. I've seen this vividly in my own life. Many of you know that Steve and I each lost our first spouses to cancer., and then about 8 years ago, our oldest son was also diagnosed with cancer. The number one thing we heard people say in that time was, "I can't believe God is doing this to your family again. What is God thinking?" And to be fair, we had that thought too. Then when his treatment was successful, and he was cured, the thing most people said was, "Praise God! God is so good!" And of course that's true and we thought that too. But it kind of threw me for a loop, because yes, God is good when the sick person is healed, but was He still good when my first husband died. God was faithful to heal our son, but He was still faithful when our spouses died. I think one of Satan's favorite tricks against Christians is to perpetuate this idea that God is good when life is good, and to make us doubt God's faithfulness and goodness when life isn't.

So, why did God set Job up to be a model of faith in the face of suffering? God knew what the accuser was thinking and was a step ahead of him. When God suggested Job, He presented exactly the scenario Satan wanted: a realistic chance at proving that people will reject God when life stinks. But, God knows all things about all people, past, present, and future. When God brought up Job, do you think he was at all worried about who would prevail in this scenario? Was there any chance at all that Satan would win here? NO!

This leads me to the third fact we see from this passage, and I think the most important of all:

*Fact #3: God is in control of everything, including those who seek destruction*

God and Satan, or any other force of evil, were not then, are not now, and never will be, equal and opposite forces of good and evil. God and Satan are not arch-rivals like Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty, or Superman and Lex Luthor. Even if this is the traditional devil, he is a far inferior creature to God, created by God as a good angel who, in his free will, decided he was not satisfied serving God and wanted to become powerful and God-like himself. But he's not. He's still under God's authority and he knows it.

Despite the absolutely horrible suffering that will Job experience, God permitted this to happen knowing that he would prevail and Satan would not. God wasn't taking a chance on Job. God was demonstrating His control over Satan and giving Satan just enough rope to hang himself. As we see a bit here, and more so in the passage that Juli will cover next week, the Satan character was only permitted to do what God would allow, because he is under the complete authority of our Almighty God.

What we'll see Job suffer next week will be excruciating, and it doesn't seem fair to him, but it served to prove Satan wrong and to teach all of us gathering here this fall along with the millions of people who have studied this book before us, that God is worthy of our faith whether life is good or not.

And, remembering someone else who experienced truly unfair suffering helps me to keep Job in perspective. Even though Job's suffering will seem unfair, Jesus's suffering truly was unfair. God more than made up for the suffering in this world when He sent His one and only Son, who was God with us, to absorb all of the evil and suffering in all of humanity in order that He might save us in the end. Jesus absolutely suffered unfairly, and was the very definition of grace for us, so even though we may ache for Job, God, better than anyone who ever lived, knows exactly the what it is to suffer because of someone else's evil.

But the title of this message asks a question I haven't tackled yet, and it's the question most of us most want answered when we or someone we love is really hurting, right?

Why Did This Happen To Me?

I'm so glad we're studying Job because of the answer this book gives to that question. And rather than make you wait 'til we get to the end of the study for the answer, I'll just give it to you now. Ready? I can see some of you are ready to write it down.

I don't know.

I know I've waded into dangerous territory here. Half of you are probably disappointed that I didn't offer a satisfying answer, while the other half of you would have been mad if I had tried to give one. But the reality of suffering is that we usually don't know why bad things happen. They just do because we live in this place where Satan still goes to and fro and walks and up and down on the earth, and apparently sometimes we have God's hedge of protection around us, and sometimes He lets Satan get through that hedge.

I hope it'll be more of a comfort than a spoiler alert to let you know up front that Job never finds out why the horrible things about to happen to him happened. In all 42 chapters of this book, even at the end when God shows up and has a lot to say, God never tells Job about this interchange with the accuser that set things in motion. God will tell him other things—brilliant things—that actually set us up to have a stronger, more unshakeable faith, but He never tells Job about what happened here behind the scenes.

But doesn't that kind of show God's wisdom? I mean, how do you think Job would have reacted to finding out that he lost his children, his reputation, his wealth and livelihood, even his health, so that he could serve as a lesson about faith despite suffering?

Back in 2004 when I held my dying husband in one arm and our newborn baby in the other, I don't think there was anything at all that anyone, including God, could have said in that moment that would have satisfied my why questions. And though I hesitate to project my thoughts onto either you or Job, I don't think he would have been ultimately satisfied with finding out why tragedy hit him either.

The frank truth is that we may never know why bad things happen to us. And, what we'll see as we work through this study is that may be the whole point. Because why do we really want to know why we suffer? At least for most of us. I know I can't speak for every woman here, but typically, why do people want to know why something bad happened to them? Is it pure curiosity? Of course not!

The why question may begin as the cry our hearts make when it is hurting—even Jesus cried why on the cross. But when we get *stuck* in the why questions, underlying that is often a desire to find out that our suffering is justified. We want to know that what we suffer is worth it.

But let me challenge you here. Ready? When we're stuck in the why questions, does the need to know why God lets suffering happen drive a feeling that we want to decide if God is right in His actions or not? Is the why question a way of demanding, "God, you'd better have a good reason for this or else"? Consider this: if you had complete confidence that God is perfectly good and loving and in control, when something bad happens, would that confidence in God lessen the need to know why something happened because you trust God even when He doesn't make sense?

The whole point of the interchange between Satan and God in this first chapter was to reveal whether Job's faith in God was conditional or not. Did Job only love God because God had given him a charmed life? If we require God to justify why we suffer, are we not still in a way putting conditions on God?

I wonder if God never revealed to Job why he suffered so that he would not be tempted to think that way. Instead, as we'll see in a few weeks, God will blow Job away by establishing His sovereignty, basically conveying the message that God is completely worthy of our trust because He has everything under control.

And, speaking at least for myself, I am much more comforted by that than I would be with an answer to the why question. When I was back in that hospital room where my first husband died, no answer to the why question would have convinced me that my suffering was worth it or justified. I was in the whitewater rapids of my life. Not only that, metaphorically speaking, icy water was pouring into my boat, my paddle was missing, and a gigantic boulder was rapidly approaching.

And in the face of that kind of terrifying whitewater rapid suffering, what do we need? We need to know that our guide is still at the helm. God was still sitting behind me with His paddle firmly in the water steering the boat through the rapids. God may take us into the rapids, but He gets us through them too. Because God is who He is, there are no rapids that He might take us into that He can't get us through. He never gets scared and freezes up. He never drops His paddle. And that's what He wants us to know and to focus on in the face of suffering. That's the point He'll make to Job. And that's what can ultimately get us through those times when life stinks.

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