

## The Patriarchs

Job finding a life coach.

There once was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless—a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil. <sup>2</sup> He had seven sons and three daughters. <sup>3</sup> He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He also had many servants. He was, in fact, the richest person in that entire area.

<sup>4</sup> Job's sons would take turns preparing feasts in their homes, and they would also invite their three sisters to celebrate with them. <sup>5</sup> When these celebrations ended—sometimes after several days—Job would purify his children. He would get up early in the morning and offer a burnt offering for each of them. For Job said to himself, "**Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts.**" This was Job's regular practice. Job 1:1-5

**Job is from Edom**, coming from Esau's family tree. He is not a child of promise. He is **not an Israelite**. We can tell because he makes no reference to the **covenant or Yahweh**. He is an **outsider to God's ways**. **He is within a culture that sees the world a certain way**. They have a certain **philosophy or way of viewing life and God**, whoever he is and how he operates in relationship with people. There are certain **basic principles** that people can intellectually understand that give order to how the world works.

**Have you ever told your kids**, "That's just not how life works?" **What you are trying to do is help them get on in life** and not fight against the current so to speak. Maybe you tried to explain over and over why you can't **just take what you want at Target** and pay for it later. That's just not how the world works, even if in your mind you aren't really stealing it.

**The movie Hitch**, because of his painful experience of being dumped by the girl he loved, Hitch **comes up with basic principles that will cause someone to fall in love with you**. He is a life coach or, more specifically, a love coach. He becomes **very successful** making lots of money helping people find love.

As we are about to find out, **Job is going to have some terrible things happen to him that he won't understand**. They don't **fit with the philosophy of life he lives by, his basic principles** that describe how the world works.

<sup>6</sup> One day the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the Lord, and the Accuser, Satan, came with them. <sup>7</sup> "Where have you come from?" the Lord asked Satan. Satan answered the Lord, "I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that's going on." <sup>8</sup> Then the Lord asked Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil."

<sup>9</sup> Satan replied to the Lord, "Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. <sup>10</sup> You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! <sup>11</sup> But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" <sup>12</sup> "All right, you may test him," the Lord said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but **don't harm him physically.**" So Satan left the Lord's presence. Job 1:6-12

And **Job loses his family, his home, and his wealth.** And he's sitting around with three friends, destitute. But there's more.

To this, Job remains faithful so Satan returns to the heavenly council. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord asked Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. And he has maintained his integrity, even though you urged me to harm him without cause."

<sup>4</sup> Satan replied to the Lord, "Skin for skin! A man will give up everything he has to save his life. <sup>5</sup> But reach out and take away his health, and he will surely curse you to your face!"

<sup>6</sup> "All right, do with him as you please," the Lord said to Satan. "But spare his life." Job 2:3-6

**If you were here last week** or watched online (I recommend you do) we talked about **Joseph**, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused of rape and imprisoned. **Joseph forgave his brothers** in the end, because God used all his travails to **save the whole family and keep his covenant with Jacob.** God used what was intended for evil to work for his purpose to keep Jacob's family alive. **We described it this way**--because **sin caused separation between God and people**, death and **deterioration** came into the world. The world just **didn't work right anymore**, from our physical bodies to our relationships, to our culture. **Because the world is broken, God gives evil a certain latitude**, but he always turns what they do around for his good purposes.

**It's like playing chess against the computer.** The computer will not allow you to cross boundaries, like breaking the rules of the game. A pawn cannot become a second queen just because you want it to. But the computer will allow you to make a stupid reckless move and, when you do, the computer will use that against you to win the game. **God allows evil to make certain moves, but he will always flank that move and use it for good.**

**Again, in this story, because the world is broken, God gives evil the latitude to operate**, but because he is wise and all powerful and good, he will use that evil move, turn it around and bring good out of it.

**I want to look at the way Job views this terrible situation and how those who seek to advise him also view it. I'm going to refer to these three men who come to console and advise Job as his life coaches. These are experts in how life works and, because they are, they can help Job navigate it.**

If you read the story, you may remember that these friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, come and at first sit silently for seven days with Job as their sign of support for him. After seven days, nodding off a few times, the awkward silence must end. At this point, a dialogue goes back and forth between Job and his life coaches.

**Job's life coaches view life this way...They are going to try to straighten Job out on how things actually work.**

They share with him their basic principles by which the world and God above it works. This is the reality of the situation. If you play by these basic principles, things will go better for you and because you must not be, you are experiencing retribution from God.

First...**God protects of the righteous.**

That was what Satan said to God. You have protected him and that's why he fears you and your protection has made him prosper.

Here's how his life coaches describe this as they try to help Job. **Doesn't your reverence for God give you confidence? Doesn't your life of integrity give you hope? <sup>7</sup> "Stop and think! Do the innocent die? When have the upright been destroyed? Job 4:6-7**

**"Job, it is self-evident that the innocent prosper and as you have prospered this has given you confidence. So, what does that say about your situation now?"**

**But if you pray to God and seek the favor of the Almighty, <sup>6</sup> and if you are pure and live with integrity, he will surely rise up and restore your happy home. <sup>7</sup> And though you started with little, you will end with much. 8:5-7**

**Come on Job, basic principle #1 is that God protects the righteous and you are clearly not being protected right now. The conclusion is obvious. You have sinned and your chickens have come to roost. This is just how the world works.**

**Is this helpful for Job? This is what he's getting from his life coaches, but it is also what he believes. He is putting God on trial and his evidence of God's guilt is his so-called righteousness. And by all extensive purposes he sounds like a really good guy who prays for his kids, believes in the one true God and cares for the poor. This is what Job gives as a response to his life coaches each time they head down this path. This means that Job agrees that this**

is how life works, therefore God is the one in the wrong and Job must be vindicated.

This is the **reap what you sow**. But isn't that in the Bible? Yes, it is. <sup>7</sup> **Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.** <sup>8</sup> **Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. Galatians 6:7-9**

**But this isn't always what happens in the real world.** This world, where Job, Joseph, and people like us live **sometimes; people get away with awful things and innocent people go to jail. Because of sin and separation from God, this world does not work according to God's justice. His kingdom will bring this about. So ultimately, yes those who plant evil, wickedness, selfishness, will reap an eternity away from God.**

Basic principle #2 from the life coaches which is just the opposite side of the coin from principle #1. **Punishment comes to the wicked.**

**Listen to this rant.** This is like a **coach going off on the team after playing bad and losing the game.**

**"The wicked writhe in pain throughout their lives. Years of trouble are stored up for the ruthless. <sup>21</sup> The sound of terror rings in their ears, and even on good days they fear the attack of the destroyer. <sup>22</sup> They dare not go out into the darkness for fear they will be murdered. <sup>23</sup> They wander around, saying, 'Where can I find bread?' They know their day of destruction is near. <sup>24</sup> That dark day terrifies them. They live in distress and anguish, like a king preparing for battle. <sup>25</sup> For they **shake their fists at God, defying the Almighty.** <sup>26</sup> Holding their strong shields, they defiantly charge against him. <sup>27</sup> "These wicked people are **heavy and prosperous**; their waists bulge with fat. <sup>28</sup> But their cities will be ruined. They will live in abandoned houses that are ready to tumble down. <sup>29</sup> Their riches will not last, and their wealth will not endure. Their possessions will no longer spread across the horizon.**

<sup>30</sup> **"They will not escape the darkness. The burning sun will wither their shoots, and the breath of God will destroy them.**

<sup>31</sup> **Let them no longer fool themselves by trusting in empty riches, for emptiness will be their only reward. <sup>32</sup> They will be cut down in the prime of life; their branches will never again be green. <sup>33</sup> They will be like a vine whose grapes are harvested too early, like an olive tree that loses its blossoms before the fruit can form. <sup>34</sup> For the godless are barren. Their homes, enriched through bribery, will burn. <sup>35</sup> They conceive trouble and give birth to evil. Their womb produces deceit."** Job 15:20-35

Wow, that was a flame thrower of a speech. "Job, do you feel better yet? Do you see the direction we are coaching you toward? You are hiding some sin, because there's no way this stuff is happening to you if you haven't. This is how the world works. You add these two principles together and this is what they say...**Suffering is always caused by behavior.**

We know that Job and his friends have got it all wrong. Sometimes bad things happen to good people in a broken world where sin has brought both death and suffering. This place doesn't work right; therefore this is bad coaching.

If Job and his life coaches are wrong about the basic principles of how can this story teach about God and how he really works? Are there basic principles that we can boil everything down to? Is there a checklist to avoid suffering in life, or at least be able to handle it.

Here's what I think the purpose of this book is and how God can speak to us through it. This book is like sunscreen. The reality of life for many of us who are of European heritage, particularly Irish people. If you go out in the sun in summer or in a subtropical climate without sunscreen, you will get burned which is painful and can cause permanent damage and bigger health problems later.

Once you feel the sting on your skin or see some red in the mirror, it's too late to put on sunscreen. You need to get out of the sun. Sunscreen is preparation for going out in the sun. You do it before you head to the beach. Think of this story as sunscreen before going out into the real world where you can get burned.

The way the writer of Job wants you to put your sunscreen on before suffering hits. He believes you do that when you...**Prepare your thinking before suffering comes.**

We must get our minds right or we will end up listening to some bad life coaches who want to tell us how life works, everything. **Suffering does not mean that God is unjust.**

Remember what Joseph said after his brothers sold him into slavery which led him to being falsely accused of rape and sent to prison for several years. <sup>19</sup> But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you?" <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. <sup>21</sup> No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them. Genesis 50:19-21

After much back and forth with his life coaches and with God about why this is happening and who's to blame for it and why are bad things happening to me when I fear God and do a lot of good things, we come to the climax of the story.

Then the Lord said to Job, <sup>2</sup> "Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God's critic, but do you have the answers?" <sup>3</sup> Then Job replied to the Lord, <sup>4</sup> "I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I will cover my mouth with my hand.

<sup>5</sup> I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say." <sup>6</sup> Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind:

<sup>7</sup> "Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. <sup>8</sup> "Will you discredit my justice and condemn me just to prove you are right? <sup>9</sup> Are you as strong as God? Can you thunder with a voice like his? <sup>10</sup> All right, put on your glory and splendor, your honor and majesty.

<sup>11</sup> Give vent to your anger. Let it overflow against the proud.

<sup>12</sup> Humiliate the proud with a glance; walk on the wicked where they stand. <sup>13</sup> Bury them in the dust. Imprison them in the world of the dead. <sup>14</sup> Then even I would praise you, for your own strength would save you. Job 40:1-14

Here's how I would put God's response... "So you think you know how this world runs? Where people have separated from me by disobedience, so I have given them what they want, the ability to choose. And how your choices have created a mess. Everybody looks out for their own interest, and they think that I'm supposed to keep it all fair and not allow any consequences. Do you really think you know what fair looks like in this world? I know what it means to promise that those who will follow and obey me that they will, in the end, be saved, but that doesn't mean that they are not going to be on the wrong end of this broken world. Do you really think that running this world can be boiled down to the principles your mind can understand? Job, I am God, and you are not."

The world does not operate based upon God's justice because it is broken. Demanding this is acting as if you deserve God's justice that is both foolish and arrogant. Watch out for what you deserve. You won't like it. Prepare your thinking before suffering comes. First understand that suffering does not mean that God is unjust... Trust God's faithfulness when I can't see his justice.

Approach God during suffering, humbly not demanding, that he fix something. I must trust that he can use this for his purposes and to bless me. Job and his life coaches want a nice tidy system, check list, three steps to handling suffering and bad things. But God is not a technology that solves a problem that we have. God is a relationship. These men wanted something that

in their culture made sense. **Something they could get their arms around because it wasn't too big or beyond what they could grasp.**

**Do you want a nice tidy political ideology that can give you easy answers to the questions of life? Then you don't have to think and, more importantly, you don't have to trust God when things seem out of control.**

**Saying, "I want predictable and consistent." That is different from faithful and mysterious, which is what a relationship with God is.**

**Prepare your thinking before suffering comes. First understand that suffering does not mean that God is unjust...Trust God's faithfulness when I can't see his justice...Don't focus on the past to answer "why" but anticipate seeing God's purposes happen.**

**Look back to see God's faithfulness and his goodness, not to try to unravel the answer to the question, "why did this happen and who is to blame."**

How does this sunscreen before suffering compare to Jesus? **As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> "Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" <sup>3</sup> "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. John 9:1-3**

**Yes, God can use what is intended for evil so that people can see Him and they can know that he is all powerful and loves them.**

Here's what Peter, one of his closest disciples, said. **Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 1 Peter 4:12-14**

As Christ followers, we can also view our sufferings as sharing in Christ's sufferings. It is a way to connect with what he did for you and me. **When I am suffering, I can say, "So, Jesus this is a little bit of how it felt for you to suffer unjustly for me. You are great and your love is amazing."**

**Let's find Job a better life coach. How about the guy from Ecclesiastes. That's a book about God's wisdom. This was a guy who wasn't afraid to call people out for their vanity and pride. His name Qoheleth (pronounced "Co-hell-eth") is the teacher of wisdom, but let's just call him Q.**

**We are going to read this together. You will play the part of Job.**

**Job: Who is God then—a weakling who cannot oppose the wicked?**

**Q:** No, he is the one who stands over all and in wisdom decrees how the world operates.

**Job:** So, in this supposed wisdom, does your God not care about the righteous and wicked conduct of his creatures?

**Q:** On the contrary. It is in the character of God to prosper the righteous and punish the wicked. In the long run, I know that it will be well for those who fear God. But, Job, we are here on this earth, and we cannot see beyond the mountains that tower around us, nor do we know about tomorrow. There is a time for everything under the sun. So how can we know what is wisest? Since God is beyond all and sees all, might his wisdom sometimes look obscure to us?

**Job:** How then shall we live?

**Q:** Take each day as it comes. When hardships come, endure them. When good things pass your way, seize them and enjoy them. And in all this continue to fear God and keep his commandments. You have looked for fulfillment in your own righteous standing before God, and now in your new quest you look for fulfillment in your vindication. Abandon the quest,

**Job!** There is nothing under the sun that brings the sense of self-fulfillment and meaning that you seem to think that you deserve. Forget thinking about what caused your tragedy—begin to think of what purpose it can serve. Your righteousness is your strength—live it out! Your desire for vindication and explanation is your weakness—leave it behind.

**Job:** You are more tolerable to speak to than my other pitiful comforters, but your wisdom seems strange. How can God not work strictly according to the principles of retribution and still be counted just?

**Q:** We cannot have all the answers, Job; we don't even know all the questions. Though we may affirm that God is just, justice has not been built into the laws by which nature operates. We do not have enough information to critique God's justice. We must be content to accept his wisdom in our lives.

**Job:** But I only wish I knew more of the wisdom of God, so I could affirm his justice!

**Q:** You have made much progress, Job. Until today you have been demanding your "rights"—that God appear and defend his justice; but "rights" too are vanity. Now you seek to learn more of his wisdom—a far more worthy goal, to which God is more likely to respond.

And in the distance they both could hear a rumble and see a disturbance on the horizon. They sat transfixed at the approach of the mighty whirlwind. John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary, Job*, pg. 46-47



Co-hell-eth is encouraging Job to **stay faithful during suffering** and not **demand an answer to a question** that you can't understand. **It's not wrong to ask the question why, we just can't stay there.** And we can't put God on trial for the fact that there is evil in the world and that evil causes suffering. **You are asking the wrong question.** The right question is, **"God what are you going to do with this?"**

Before you go out into this broken world, now is the time to, not when suffering has scrambled your brain, **Put on your sunscreen.** In this world if it isn't hot, it soon will be.

First do what Job did, **Confess any pride and bitterness from past suffering.**

**Have you been operating based upon the basic principles of this world? Did that lead you to blame God, and the church for your suffering?**

**Maybe that's you at home.** You have a strong affinity for Jesus, but because of what has happened to you in the past, you and the church in any of its forms are dead to you.

**Let's deal with our pride first, that says I deserve to be vindicated, I deserve to know the why in my terms.** We are not God. **"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. <sup>9</sup> For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9**

**"Even though you are my prophet and people will be reading and studying your words until time is no more, there are some things that are above your understanding and my justice is one of those things."**

That begs the next question...**How can I seek God's wisdom in preparation for next time? Next time, meaning when I experience suffering.** Will I be better prepared or will I look for answers in our culture and its basic principles. **Will I have sunscreen** that will help me avoid long term damage?

Would the time used to come read through the Bible this year be worth it if you are prepared for the next wave of suffering?

**Would joining a Bridge Group** where, in a relational setting, you can walk through life together with other Christ followers be worth it if you were prepared for the next wave of suffering?