

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: GOD...in the Storm**

(Studies in the book of Job)

### **When Life Turns Nightmare**

(Introduction; Chapter 1)

Study #1

#### **Introduction: A funny thing happened on the way to...where?**

During the first of my two recent weeks away I went backpacking with my son, Ben, for a few days in the Rockies. A nearly annual event, this year we traveled to the beautiful and rugged Wind River Range in southwest Wyoming.

It's always a good idea to have an idea where you're going before you start out on a trek into wilderness. And we did have a plan.

Our plan was ambitious. Leaving from the Elkhart Trailhead we intended to hike up to the very high Indian Pass and then go off-trail for three days. We would travel point to point with only map and compass to guide us.

That plan got scuttled on Day Two when we re-discovered the effect of high altitude on San Antonio flatlanders.

Exhausted, we rested at the 12,120 foot high Indian Pass and then trudged back down at the end of Day Two, somewhat deflated at not getting to do our Epic Trek.

However, the trip turned unexpectedly EPIC the next day as we - with zero experience on glaciers - hiked up to a glacier and crossed glacial run-off that was (yes) icy, swift, and deep.

Then we inadvertently hiked over a glacier, climbed the sheerest and steepest rock face Ben and I have ever climbed, and descended yet another glacier field.

From the bottom of this second glacier we hiked the length of the beautiful, turquoise Summer Ice Lake (don't you love that name?!) and then descended a waterfall chute down to a spot level enough to pitch our shelters and cook dinner before the storm hit (it never hit - but it sure did look threatening).

To cut short what could be a very long story, we successfully made it back to Elkhart Trailhead late in the morning of the fifth day, not having done at all what we set out to do, but accomplishing something we had never dreamed we would do.

So, yes, we had a plan. But the plan changed as we hiked, due to incomplete knowledge of the area, inexact (i.e. - bad) planning, and unforeseen obstacles. The planning we did in advance was vitally important, but a variety of factors required some on-the-fly adjustments.

I tell this story here at the beginning, in part, because it's kind of a fun story.

But the story helps illustrate the importance of advance planning on a Sunday when we kick-off a new series of studies in the Old Testament book of Job.

During this study there will, no doubt, be some surprises along the way. Mid-course corrections are to be expected. But there is great benefit to starting off with some understanding of where you think you are going.

So, before we start navigating our way through the weeds of the first chapter, I propose that we pull out a map and think for a bit about the book of Job, from about forty thousand feet up.

#### **Job, as literature**

Most everyone (and I mean, everyone!) agrees that this forty-two chapter book is an incredibly well-crafted piece of literature.

The book of Job winds up on most everyone's list of the 100 greatest books of all time.<sup>1</sup>

On a personal level, my first acquaintance with Job was in a High School English Lit class. While I've never before brought a series of messages from Job, I've been fascinated with the book since my teens.

It is historical narrative and poetry and courtroom drama and wisdom literature<sup>2</sup> all rolled into one *magnum opus*.

### Authorship

We don't know who wrote the book of Job.<sup>3</sup> Suggestions range from Job himself, to the young man, Elihu who is the speaker from Job chapters 32-37, to King Solomon (This assumes that he received the story after it had been handed down via oral tradition<sup>4</sup> over many centuries).

Personally, I am of the opinion that one of Job's contemporaries - probably Elihu - put stylus to tablet and gave us the book we hold in our hands today.<sup>5</sup>

### Date of Events

And if it is not all that clear *who* wrote the book, it is more clear *when* the events described in the book occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish philosopher and author, Thomas Carlyle wrote, "*There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit.*" Lots of people agree with Carlyle.

<sup>2</sup> The Wisdom books of the Bible are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, along with some of the Psalms. Some identify the Song of Solomon as Wisdom literature.

<sup>3</sup> Many (more liberal) scholars deny the single authorship of Job. Some believe that the prose prologue and epilogue must have been written by a different author than the one who wrote the poetic middle section. However, the prose-poetry-prose format is found elsewhere in northern African literature, as in the Egyptian "Tale of the Eloquent Peasant", dating from around 1900 BC.

<sup>4</sup> Literacy was widespread in the Ancient Near East, even as early as the early part of the second millennium, BC. Thus, while the message of Job may have been faithfully transmitted via oral tradition (a very reliable means of passing down stories *verbatim* through many centuries), it is very possible that the story was written down shortly after the events and the dialogue took place.

<sup>5</sup> I and many others believe that Job was likely the first book of the Bible written.

Judging from internal evidence, it seems clear that the events recorded happened before the time of Moses, who lived around 1500 BC.<sup>6</sup>

The late W. F. Albright, a brilliant Bible scholar and archaeologist, believed that Job was lived at the time of the patriarchs (e.g. - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), which dates him around 2000 BC.<sup>7</sup>

OK. So that is a bit about the book. Fascinating. Why spend a bunch of Sunday mornings dealing with it?

### *Why Job?*

Well, I have chosen to spend a few weeks in Job because I believe we need the timely and timeless truths found here. My plan is to finish up the series just before Thanksgiving, and I believe that these weeks will give us ample time to explore some themes that are crucial for a life with God.

We will see a man whose life falls apart at the seams. Today, lives still fall apart at the seams. We will see messiness and unpredictability. We'll find that there is no formula that guarantees a life that works the way we want it to. It is important that we understand and embrace the messy ambiguity of life and Job leads us into that understanding.

We will see the value of lament. Lament differs from grumbling and complaining. Those are toxic. Lament is good. It is good grief. We need to revive the healthy grace of honest lament.

Then, we will see the role we can play as a friend of someone who is suffering. We are warned by the toxic example of some of Job's friends who maintain a safe distance (emotionally and physically) and who offer heretical ideas to their suffering friend. But we will also catch a vision for the genuine help of the gift of presence AND for the possibility that we can be powerful friends who point our suffering friends to God.

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<sup>6</sup> Some have supposedly found evidence of the Mosaic Law in Job 24:2-11. But this passage really only argues against mistreating the poor in several of the ways in which that might have occurred in an ancient, agrarian world.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, this has been the view throughout much of the Christian era and has historically been the view of the Jews.

We will watch a godly man (Job) initially respond to his trials with integrity and faith. And then we'll watch as, over time, his responses morph into something ugly. That is a warning to all of us who face trials (and that is all of us!).

And then we will see a faithful, wise, all-powerful, just and wildly unpredictable God who asks us to trust Him, no matter what.

### *The message of the book*

I will admit that, at least on the surface, there are similarities between Job and the book of Ruth, the book that Jeff has just finished leading you through. Naomi suffered loss and Job suffered loss. But as you will soon see, there are profound differences between these two books.

Through the story of Ruth and Naomi, there is a crucial question, "Does God care about me?" The answer is a resounding "Yes!"

Job asks and answers a very different set of questions.

- You may have heard that the message of the book of Job is about suffering.
- You may have heard that it addresses the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" or "Why do bad things happen to good people?"
- You may have heard that Job is a book about *theodicy* - that it is a case study in the justice of God.

Personally, I don't think that these ideas get to the heart of what Job is all about. But we won't get to what IS the heart of the matter if we don't turn to the text.

So, without any more delay, let's move forward now into the jam-packed first verse of Job.

### **Earthly Bliss for a World Class Man of God (vv. 1-5)**

#### **Job and His Sterling Character (v. 1)**

*[1] There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.*

*Live, from the land of Uz!*

Far from being a make-believe land (Think "Oz"), the land of Uz was a real place, a place that most commentators agree was located in the ancient land of Edom.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the events recorded in the book of Job occurred in northern Arabia, just south and east of the Dead Sea.<sup>9</sup>

Picture an area close to a desert (1:19), but a land fertile enough to sustain agriculture and livestock (1:3, 14; 42:12).<sup>10</sup>

And then we are introduced to the star of the show: Job.

*The star of the show: Job*

#### His name

Surprisingly (certainly for a biblical account), there is no mention of Job's family heritage. His lineage is shrouded in mystery and we know nothing of his family tree.<sup>11</sup>

But if we don't know his family tree, we are told something of his character.

#### His character

He is, first of all, "**blameless.**" You couldn't throw an accusation of sin at Job and have it stick.<sup>12</sup>

He is, further, "**upright.**" He was a good guy. He had integrity.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> One source that takes exception is the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, which places Uz in northern Mesopotamia, near the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers. In addition, Keil and Delitzsch seem to take this view. I disagree and would place Uz in northern Arabia (Edom).

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly enough, that means that the scene is not at all Jewish. Uz is located outside of the land of Canaan/Israel. There is nothing Jewish about this book.

<sup>10</sup> So, Zuck (commentary), Archer (A Survey of Old Testament Introduction).

<sup>11</sup> His name probably derives from a Hebrew word meaning "to come back" or "to repent" - signifying one who comes back to God. Could also mean "the one who is assailed", from the Hebrew *ayeb*, to hate.

<sup>12</sup> The New Testament would say he was "**above reproach.**" (See 1 Timothy 3)

And he feared God.

In the Bible we find a number of different names for God. The name by which the Jews knew God - the covenant name for God - was *Yahweh*. It means something like “**I AM**”.

The word for God here in Job 1:1 is not *Yahweh*. It is *Elohim*. *Elohim* is a general name for God that was used by most of the ancient peoples of the near east. It denotes the One who is all powerful and Who has all authority.

This is Job’s knowledge of God. He worshiped the true God, but was not of the chosen line of Abraham.

Finally, Job turned away from evil. Injustice. Moral evil. Sexual evil. Financial impropriety. He ran from all of it.

We read this first verse of the book of Job and come to the conclusion that Job was a class act. He was a really fine man.

And there’s more we need to know about Job. He’s VERY blessed!

### **Job and His Blessed Life (vv. 2-3)**

*His large family (v. 2)*

**[2] Seven sons and three daughters were born to him.**<sup>14</sup>

By any standard, that’s a big family!

By the time we meet him, his ten children are grown. That means that he must have been a man of some years, a seasoned citizen, a high mileage man. Many scholars guess that Job was about 57 years of age. (☺)

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<sup>13</sup> When speaking of Jews who were upright, the Bible means that they kept the Mosaic Law. Job lived *before* the Mosaic Law was written, so that is not what is in view here.

<sup>14</sup> The numbers 3, 7, and 10 are all numbers indicating completeness.

And besides the blessing of his three daughters and seven sons the author tells us of his many possessions. Job was exceptionally wealthy!

*His possessions (v. 3a)*

**[3a] His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants**

From elsewhere in the book, we know that Job was highly respected (29:7-11), was a fair and honest judge (29:7, 12-17), was a wise counselor (29:21-24), an honest employer (31:13-15; 38-39), and hospitable and generous to those in need (31:16-21)

*Summary statement (v. 3b)*

In every way, Job was a great man. And so the summary of his life reads, **[3b]...and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.**

The author probably could have provided dozens of examples of how great a guy Job was, but he only gives one story.

And the one story gives us insight into how his character and his walk with God and his family leadership all meshed into one seamless, holistic holiness.

### **Job and His Priestly Life Before God (vv. 4-5)**

*Picture of a happy family (v. 4)*

**[4] 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.**

Every day of the week was a feast at one of the seven sons’ homes.<sup>15</sup> The three sisters were invited to eat and drink with their brothers.

Clearly, Job had a loving, tight family.

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<sup>15</sup> As Keil-Delitzsch makes clear, this was almost certainly not each son’s annual birthday celebration.

Job functioned as his loving family's priest to God.

*Just in case... (v. 5)*

***[5] When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all;<sup>16</sup> for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.<sup>17</sup>***

Every 8<sup>th</sup> day, after the seven days of feasting (which would also be the first day of a new cycle), Job would arise early in the morning, gather ten animals, bring his children together, and offer the ten animals to atone for any sins his kids might have committed.<sup>18</sup>

In this act we see both his love for his children AND his reverence for God.

And that's Job. His life is great. He enjoys every blessing he could wish for.

And he is not one of those who got what he has through conniving and scheming. He is a man of integrity, a gracious man who helps people, loves his family, and loves God.

This is what we see in the first five verses of the book. It's about as close to heaven on earth as it gets.

Then, the author quickly shifts our attention from earth to heaven. He pulls back the curtain so that we get to see events happening in another realm, the realm of God and His angels.

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<sup>16</sup> Note again that there is nothing particularly Jewish about these sacrifices. People in cultures all around the world have offered sacrifice to God to atone for sin. Nor is there any reference to a Sabbath rhythm to the banquets or sacrifices.

<sup>17</sup> As several commentators have noted, Job's role here indicates a patriarchal family-clan type of organization reminiscent of Abraham's time, confirming the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium time frame (roughly 2,000 BC) for this story.

<sup>18</sup> Again, not YHWH, but God (Elohim).

## **Heavenly Conflict (vv. 6-12)**

### **Setting the scene for the wager: (v. 6)**

***[6] Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.***

This is an assembly day in heaven. We don't know for what reason the "*sons of God*" (angels) have come to present themselves before God (here, Yahweh). But there they are. And included in this assembly is one called "*the adversary*" or Satan.<sup>19</sup>

This is the being we know as the devil and he's opposed to God and His ways and His kingdom. He is God's adversary and he is the adversary of God's people.

Satan shows up at this heavenly assembly with the sons of God. The Lord notices his presence and asks him a question.

### **Satan, a Very Active Adversary (v. 7)**

***[7] The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."***

Now God was no more looking for information from Satan than He was when He asked Adam and Eve, "*Where are you?*" after they sinned in the Garden of Eden.

God knew what Satan had been doing and where he had been. The question was to prompt Satan to be forthcoming about his activities.

Well, Satan's not very forthcoming. His answer is vague and evasive, like a rebellious kid's response to his parents, or a street thug answering a police officer, "*Oh, I've just been hanging around. You know.*"

Satan doesn't want to reveal too much of his activities to the Lord.

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<sup>19</sup> Some refer to this being as "The Satan".

In our New Testaments we read that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for people to devour (1 Peter 5:8). That was what Satan was doing in the days of Job, too.

God knew that Satan was looking for people to accuse and to dominate. So God draws Satan's attention to His servant, Job.

### **God Boasts of His Servant, Job (v. 8)**

***[8] The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."***

The Lord is bragging about Job's character, almost "baiting" Satan. "Here's one man you haven't gotten to!" - and He goes on to describe Job exactly as he was described earlier (v. 2).

So, what we read earlier was not just a favorable review of Job by a frail human writer. God Himself saw Job as blameless and upright, a God-fearer who turned away from evil. Wow!

Job is God's triumph. A man who has not fallen for Satan's tempting schemes. Satan has failed in his efforts to corrupt Job.

Well, Satan is not impressed.

### **Satan, a Very Cynical Adversary (vv. 9-11)**

*"Yeah, Job loves You. Sure he does..." (vv. 9-10)*

***[9] Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? [10] "Have You not made a hedge about 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."***

Satan's claim is that Job has simply found out how life works. A little bit of righteousness; a little bit of blessing. A lot of righteousness; a lot of blessing.

So of course he leads an unusually righteous life. Who wouldn't? It's just smart.<sup>20</sup>

According to Satan, Job's "righteousness" has nothing to do with a heartfelt passion for God. He is not concerned to be God's faithful witness on earth. His worship has nothing to do with a reverent response to the majesty of the Creator.

And to prove his point Satan suggests a test, a wager.

*"Let's see how much he loves You when you take away his toys."*  
(v. 11)

***[11] "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."***

Notice the details of the wager.

One, he's not asking to personally afflict Job. He dares God to afflict Job. And two, he's not suggesting little bit of affliction, but a destructive "touch" of all that Job has.

Satan is confident that if Job suffers loss he will cease to be the model citizen he has been so far. Rather than fear God he will curse God - ***"to Your face."*** *"Job will hate You if you take away his toys."*

And just like that, with no hesitation, God takes the wager.

### **God Permits Satan's Limited Action Against Job (v. 12)**

***[12] Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.***

The stakes of this wager are huge.

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<sup>20</sup> He admits that Job fears God, but says that it's only because God has protected him from evil and blessed him with every good thing.

God claims that Job is righteous because of genuine reverence and love. This is, after all, what God is looking for - someone who will trust Him, worship Him and love Him NO MATTER WHAT.

Satan says that Job has been God's good little soldier because of a good return on investment, simple cost/benefit analysis.

Job is God's greatest trophy of grace and by taking Satan's dare, God is putting His champion to the test.

And so the wager moves forward. God leaves the "touching" to Satan. God won't afflict Job. But He does permit Satan to do whatever he wants to do with all that Job has. The only limit is that Satan is NOT permitted to personally "touch" Job.

And with that, Satan leaves to begin his attack on Job's world.

Here is the great theme of the book of Job. So far, Job has been a great representative of God to his world. Will he continue to be so when the blessings of God go away? He has been a faithful God-worshiper? Will he still worship after he loses everything?

Job knows nothing of this heavenly conversation. He is just living his life where everything is sweetness and light.

But that state of affairs won't last for long. Satan is busy putting in place four separate calamities. The orchestration of these calamities would have taken some time. But the reports of the four disasters all come in rapid succession on one day.

### **The Wager: Round One (vv. 13-22)**

#### **Calamities Strike! (vv. 13-19)**

*Calamity #1 (vv. 13-15)*

***[13] Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, [14] a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, [15] and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."***

The Sabeans were a warlike tribe of desert Bedouins, very active in Job's day. Attacks from the Sabeans would not have been unexpected. But this attack was devastating.

Job had five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred female donkeys. They are all taken, just like that - and many of Job's servants are killed.

As soon as this first report is given, up staggers another messenger with more bad news.

*Calamity #2 (v. 16)*

***[16] While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."***

If the attack of the Sabeans might have been expected, fire falling from heaven to consume seven thousand sheep - along with the servants - would not have been expected!

Yes, this could have been a terrible natural disaster, but when the messenger identifies it as "***the fire of God from heaven***" Job's instinct would certainly have been to think of God's active hand.

Before this second messenger had even finished his report, in comes another messenger bearing more terrible news.

*Calamity #3 (v. 17)*

***[17] While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."***

The Chaldeans (predecessors to the Babylonians who at this time in their history were nomadic) attacked Job's camels in three bands.

Like the attack of the Sabeans, this might have been expected. But it is still an unbelievably great loss to have all three thousand of his camels stolen - and the servants who watched the camels killed.

Finally, the fourth and most devastating message came right on the heels of the third.

Like the second calamity (fire from heaven), this one would not have been expected. All ten of Job's grown children were together feasting when another terrible natural disaster struck.

*Calamity #4 (vv. 18-19)*

***[18] While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, [19] and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."***

Yes, tornadoes happen. Great gusts of damaging wind are natural occurrences.

But the piling on of these four calamities - Sabeans and Chaldeans, fire and wind - one after the other in rapid succession, leaves Job with only one conclusion as to their source. This wasn't terrible luck. This was God.

#### **Job's God-Honoring Response (vv. 20-21)**

***[20] Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. [21] He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."***

*Grief and anguish*

Job's sufferings were financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual, and his head is now as naked as his life. He has lost all his material wealth and his precious children.

His shaved head and his torn robes shout his grief. And as he grieves, he worships.

#### *Worship*

For his whole life he has accepted all that he had as gifts from God's gracious hand. Now it is all gone and he accepts his loss as also from God (and it truly was taken away as a result of God giving Satan permission to act!). Even in pain Job blesses his God.

#### *Evaluating his response*

Now, of course, technically, Job was wrong. We know that it was not God who "took away." It was Satan.

And if you search the Internet you'll find people who shake their heads at poor, deluded Job who didn't understand what was really going on.

You'll read mocking words aimed at people like us who sing Matt Redmon's song, "**Blessed By Your Name**" with the chorus, "*He gives and takes away.*"

What a foolish thing for Job to say and what a foolish song for us to sing.

To which I say, "*Really?*"

I applaud Job! I give Job a standing ovation for his trust and reverence!

His response was exactly what God was looking for, which is why the author records the score at the end of Round One of the wager between God and Satan as he does.

#### **Conclusion: God's Triumph in Round One! (v. 22)**

***[22] Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.***

Now the fight isn't over. But Satan has lost the first round of the wager. God and His champion, Job, have won a decisive victory in Round One!



And I want to leave you with three thoughts this morning to ponder as we wrap up.

1. *First, notice how Job's experience highlights the messiness of life.*

The greatest man in all the east, a man who was blameless and upright, who feared God and turned away from evil suffered the loss of everything dear to him. His life fell apart at the seams. Hmmm...

We want to know how to make life work. We would have thought that Job nailed it with an impeccably righteous life. Not so. His life turned nightmare - and he did nothing wrong.

Then we look around us - or we look in the mirror - and have to admit that Job's experience is not unique. Innocent people still suffer through no fault of their own. Really bad things do happen to really good people.

There are no reliable formulas that will guarantee life will turn out the way we hope. Life is messy. Job's life forces us to admit to the messiness.

2. *Second, reflect on God and His ways in this story.*

We do not believe that our God is capricious or arbitrary in His rule. We believe that He is just and wise. But unavoidable questions rise from this story about God and His ways.

The evidence from what we have seen today brings a sobering challenge to our concept of God. In an honest moment we'll be filled with ambivalence and understandable questions, like:

- What kind of a God would barter away His blessings from a righteous man in a wager with Satan?
- What is God trying to prove?
- Can such a God be trusted?

Go ahead and ask the questions. Don't be afraid to ask them. Don't shy away from them. Now, don't judge God (after all, Job didn't), but bring your honest questions to Him.

3. *Third, as you encounter trials this week, ask yourself what response God is seeking from you.*

Watch Job.

He leads the way with honest grief. Clothing ripped and a buzz haircut. He follows that up with heartfelt worship, blessing the Lord.

And in all of this he never blamed God. Oh, he never pretended that God wasn't involved in his losses ("***The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away***"), but He didn't accuse God of doing anything wrong.

Scripture judges that response to be "sinless."

When faced with trials, my prayer for you and for me is that God would give us the grace to face life squarely, accept loss with honest grief, and never stop worshiping, blessing God, always "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission.