

“What to Do When Tragedy Strikes”

Job 1:13-22

Most people who have lived long enough are familiar with certain dates and the events that are associated with them:

- December 7, 1941—Pearl Harbor
- November 22, 1963—Assassination of JFK
- September 11, 2001—Terrorist Attacks

Just the mere mention of these dates brings back the fresh experience of what happened. You can remember with vivid detail where you were, what you were doing, and how you felt when you first heard the news. Such is the way it is when tragedy strikes.

“Tragedy” - *an event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress; a very bad event that causes great sadness*

Tragedy confronts us with the frailty of our humanity, and the brevity of our days upon earth. Day in and day out, we all tend to get caught up in the monotonous routine of life. That is, until tragedy strikes from out of nowhere and pulls the rug out from under our feet.

I imagine that it doesn't take much for you to remember the worst day that you have ever had. And yet no matter how bad that day was, I cannot imagine it being any worse than Job's day.

Verse 13 begins this way—“Now there was a day.” In just a matter of minutes, Job's life goes from the top of the mountain to the valley floor, from the pinnacle of success to a life in free-fall.

Like a lightning bolt out of the blue, tragedy strikes Job's life and leaves his heart broken and his head spinning. However, it is Job's response to his tragedies that I want us to pay close attention to. I have heard it said that the truest test of integrity is not just our actions but our reactions.

Someone once asked C.S. Lewis, “Why do the righteous suffer?” He replied, “Why shouldn't the righteous suffer? They're the only ones who can handle it.” And yet when we consider the suffering of Job, we find that it is only intensified by the fact that it was undeserved. Job didn't

know why God allowed tragedy to come his way, but he met it head-on with faith in God and his infinite wisdom.

Here in this passage, Job will teach us how to respond when disaster strikes, what to do when tragedy comes our way.

1. The WRECKAGE of Job's life (1:13-19)

“Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and there came a messenger to Job and said, ‘The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’ While he was yet speaking, there came another 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.’ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, ‘The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, ‘Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’”

Verse 13 begins by saying, “Now there was a day.” It was a day that began like any other day. I'm sure that just like most days, Job had things to do, people to see, and business to conduct. This was an ordinary day in his life, a day in which his ten children were getting together in the home of their oldest brother.

On this day, Job is perhaps somewhere out on his estate, tending to some business matters, when one by one, four messengers—each one a harbinger of disaster—make their way to him with tragic news.

Alexander Whyte - *“Job's sorrows came not in a single spy, but in battalions.”*

The news that Job's receives would forever change his life. You can compare it to the chilling phone call you get in the middle of the night, or the unexpected knocking on your door with an

unannounced visit from someone wearing a uniform. The news that they share is not good news, nor is it welcomed.

The news that Job receives brings him to his knees in unspeakable grief. He would go from being the greatest man in the east to its most miserable and wretched citizen. In a matter of minutes, Job goes from the pinnacle of blessing to the pit of despair. His successful life would be reduced to a pile of wreckage and rubble, and he himself left sifting through the ashes.

Notice his losses:

The loss of his livestock and servants (v. 14-15)

The first messenger informs Job that Sabean raiders had seized his oxen and donkeys while they were feeding, and they put all of Job's servants to death by sword. This was a crushing blow to Job, for by itself it would have been a major financial loss.

“Sabeans” - *a nomadic group of people from northern Arabia*

The protective hedge that had been placed around his life and business was removed. Though Job didn't know, you and I know that Satan has begun his attack, and behind the scenes, he is the one who is stirring up the Sabeans to attack Job.

The Bible says that Satan has great influence and power over people. He can fill their hearts to lie, steal, kill, and inflict harm. He blinds the minds of those who do not believe Christ, and he fills their hearts with rage and malice to act against God's people and lash out against God's truth.

The loss of his flock and servants (v. 16)

No sooner than did the first messenger finish telling Job about the livestock, a second messenger comes and has worse news. This time, the news was that the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed all of Job's sheep as well as his shepherds.

“Fire of God” - *perhaps a reference to a lightning bolt*

The first catastrophe involved raiders, but this catastrophe is a form of natural disaster. It is an interesting note that the messenger blames God, for the only explanation the messenger can give is that it is an act of God. Ultimately, God allows it to happen, for He is the Creator who is

in control of all nature. However, we know that once again Satan is behind the loss, which means that God has given him permission to use natural forces for his own twisted objectives.

Atheists and often use natural disasters as an excuse in their attempt to argue a loving God would not allow such things to happen. They will say, "What kind of monstrous God would ever allow terrible things to happen to innocent people?"

Their attitude is summed up in a parody of the doxology:

*Blame God from whom all cyclones blow,
Blame Him, all creatures here below.
Blame Him, who knocks down church and steeple,
Who sends the floods, and drowns the people.*

It is hard for us to grasp the truth that God does indeed allow bad things to happen to good people. Disaster strikes all of us in some way, and the main reason is that we are living in a world that is under a curse brought on by Adam's sin. (Luke 13:1-5)

- hurricanes destroy our homes
- earthquakes level our cities
- floods drown our loved ones

Disaster and tragedy are all part of life in an imperfect world, a world that has been devastated by the ravages of Satan's rebellion and humanity's sin.

The loss of his camels and servants (v. 17)

If losing his livestock and sheep is not enough, there is a third wave of loss that hits Job. A third messenger comes and tells him that three bands of Chaldeans made raids on the camels, took possession of them, and murdered the servants.

Three servants, in a matter of seconds, essentially tell Job that his fortune has evaporated. That morning, he had been the wealthiest man in the east. By lunch, he's left without a cent to his name.

It is astonishing at how quickly life's circumstances can change. All it takes is a bad economy, an unforeseen collapse, or a thief.

There was an article that recently caught my attention:

TIME Magazine, “You Think You Had a Bad Day? Man Loses \$14 Billion in a Half Hour” (May 2015) - *“The founder of a renewable energy company lost big when the company's stock crashed...”*

CNN also reported about this story last year when the wealthiest man in China, Li Hejun, lost his fortune within an hour after the Asian stock market plunged.

Proverbs 23:4-5 - “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”

You had better not place all of your confidence and seek your identity from your possessions, because you can lose it all in minute's time.

Job loses his fortune and his servants. Maybe as he is processing his losses, he thinks to himself, “At least I still have my family.”

The loss of his children (v. 18-19)

The worst harbinger of doom is the final one. Satan saves his most lethal weapon for last, the one that would surely bring Job to his knees, fill his heart with bitterness, and cause him to curse God. A fourth messenger comes to Job and says, “Job, I have bad news to tell you about your children. A windstorm struck the house where they were gathered, and it collapsed. None of them made it out alive.”

We can lose our job's and deal with the pain it brings. We can lose our possessions and deal with that, for in time we recover. However, the most intense pain we will ever experience in life is the loss of our loved ones.

We've all been there at some point. The days comes:

- when a family gathers around their parent's bedside and said goodbye
- when someone attended the funeral of a dear friend
- when a mom or a dad received word that their son or daughter had lost their life in an accident, or through sickness

When there is a rational explanation for a loved one's death, such as sickness or service to their country, as painful as it is, we can cope with that. However, it is when something tragic happens out of the blue, something totally unexpected, something for which there is no explanation, this is Job's pain. Job receives word that not one child, not two children, not five of his children—but all 10 of his children—are tragically killed in a random, freak, and unforeseen accident.

In verse 1, we are given a picture of a man who was righteous, who loved God and hated sin, a man with tremendous influence and a wonderful family. By the time we get to verse 19, that same man has seen his fortune go up in smoke and he is standing beside ten fresh graves out on a hillside.

And to make matters worse, heaven will remain silent for Job. He will be given no answers for the reason behind his sorrows.

2. The WORSHIP of Job's heart (1:20)

"Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped."

Job's world had crumbled around him in a matter of minutes, leaving him in a state of shock and intense grief. Now, the minute that Satan had been waiting for had come.

Satan thinks to himself, "Let's see how Job responds to his losses!"

- Will his faith crumble like a house of cards?
- Will he point his finger toward heaven and blame God?

The moment of truth had come. However, Job doesn't respond the way that he had anticipated. In the midst of his sorrow and no doubt through the hot tears of brokenhearted grief, Job hits his knees, bows his head, and worships God. In a move that leaves the devil speechless, Job raises open hands to worship and not clinched fists.

There are five verbs used in verse 20 that explain the depth of Job's agony and his devotion to God. These verbs reveal to us Job's three-fold response to tragedy. Here are the verbs and what they teach us:

- He arose
- He tore his robe

- He shaved his head
- He fell on the ground
- He worshiped

Job was honest about his pain

In ancient cultures, to tear one's robe and shave one's head was the ultimate symbol of grief. Reeling under the impact of loss, he was far too crushed in spirit to put up any false front of courage. It means that Job was honest about his pain. We never do ourselves any favors when we try to avoid and hide our grief.

Charles Swindoll - *"I am disappointed that someone, somewhere, many years ago, introduced the ridiculous idea that if you know the Lord, you don't grieve. That even if you lose something or someone significant, you shouldn't weep...No tears? No grief? I find that unthinkable. Since when does becoming a Christian make a person less than human...or more than human?"*

Our sorrow is very real, we grieve with immense pain, and this is part of being human. Yet we do not sorrow as those who have no hope.

Job was humble through deep reverence

Upon tearing his robe and shaving his head, the Bible says that Job collapsed on the ground. However, there is more than meets the eye with this statement. Job intentionally gets as low as he can to express his grief and humility before Almighty God. Such is the position of faith and trust.

Job was heartfelt in his worship of God

The last verb in verse 20 says that Job worshiped. The word used here is significant, for it means to prostrate oneself before a superior.

Joshua 5:14 - **"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to Him, What has my Lord to say to His servant?"**

2 Samuel 12:20 - **"So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped."**

It is a word that describes the worship of total surrender, complete trust, and fullness of faith. Such worship is an act of the will whereby one chooses to worship God, even when he doesn't understand why.

3. The WISDOM of Job's words (1:21-22)

"And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong."

When Job had the very worst day in his life, he didn't complain, he didn't assign blame to God, and he didn't demand his rights. Instead, Job did the very thing that Satan said he wouldn't do — He worshiped. Instead of maligning God, Job magnified God. Instead of lashing out, Job looked up. And instead of getting bitter, Job got better.

Satan may have taken everything that Job owned, but one thing he couldn't take was Job's praise. He could steal his possessions and murder his family, but he couldn't squelch Job's worship.

Satan cannot sever Job's relationship with God. (Rom. 8)

What Job says in verse 21 is perhaps one the greatest acts of faith and devotion to God that is recorded in Scripture, and the wisdom of Job's words is remarkable. Notice what he says:

1:21a - "Naked I entered the world, and naked I'll depart."

Tragedies that come our way in life have a way of separating what matters in life from what is insignificant. Tragedy has a way of reminding us what is most important, and what is most valuable.

Erwin Lutzer - *"No one lamented a lost plasma TV or a submerged SUV. No one ran through the streets yelling, 'My cordless drill is missing.' If they mourned, it was for people lost. If they rejoiced, it was for people found...Raging hurricanes have a way of prying our fingers off things that really don't matter."*

An online article was released on slate.com a few years ago, and it was devoted to the almost overnight appearance of storage unit facilities in our country.

Tom Vanderbilt - *“According to the Self Storage Association, the country now possesses about 1.9 billion square feet of personal storage space outside of the home. All this space is contained in nearly 40,000 facilities...According to a recent survey, one homeowner out of every eleven also owns a self-storage space. This represents an increase of 75% [in the last decade]. Most operators of self-storage facilities report 90% occupancy but, amazingly, as the amount of storage space required by homeowners has grown, so has the average size of the American house. The National Association of Homebuilders reports that the average American house grew from 1,600 square feet in 1973 to 2,400 square feet by 2004, and the number is increasing (2,600 sq. ft. by 2014). So—houses got bigger, average family sizes got smaller, and yet we need two billion square feet of extra space to store our stuff?”*

If stuff is what you live for, what will your life consist of when all your stuff is gone? Perhaps we need to be reminded of the simple truth found here in verse 21 —“Naked I entered this life, and naked I will exit this life.”

Life is more than possessing things and pursuing fortune.

We’ve seen in verse 20 how Job releases his grief to God, and how he responds to the greatness of God. Notice that here in verse 21, Job reflects on the goodness of God.

1:21b - “The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

He refuses to assign guilt to God, and thereby remains guiltless before God. Job’s faith does not make him immune to suffering. Instead, his faith makes him a target. There is no such thing as a little suffering. All suffering is painful for those who are experiencing it.

Bill Walton - *“I learned a long time ago that minor surgery is when they do an operation on someone else.”*

Job is told that the “fire of God” fell and consumed the sheep. If Job had went with his gut, if he had based his actions on the emotions he felt, he would have blamed God. But he doesn’t do that. Job bases his words and his actions on the truth that he knew. He knew that:

Application for My Life:

1. A broken heart is better than a bitter spirit
2. An open hand is better than a clinched fist

3. A closed mouth is better than a loose tongue

When the enemy roared like a lion, Job didn't run nor did he assign blame to God. He fell on his face in worship and trust.

Many of you will remember the story from six months ago or so about a young pastor from Indiana named Davey Blackburn whose wife was brutally murdered. On the morning of November 10, while Davey was away at the gym, the Indianapolis police department informed him of the tragic news that his wife Amanda was shot three times during a home invasion. She succumbed to her injuries the following day along with their 13-week-old unborn daughter, Everette "Evie" Grace Blackburn. Their story was on all of the major news networks.

Just this week, Davey wrote a post on his blog:

Davey Blackburn - *"Most of us have seen a National Geographic or Discovery Channel special of lions hunting in the plains of Africa. What you may not know is that it's not the males but the females, the lionesses, that are actually the hunters. The males are inherently too slow and lazy. The male does play a specific role, however. He will get on one side of a watering hole where gazelles or wildebeests have chosen to bath. He will flare his mane, get as tall as he possibly can and let out a ferocious roar that would shake the nerves of any living creature within a 50 mile radius! The roar is supposed to scare the prey into running away. What the prey doesn't know is that the lionesses have strategically placed themselves on the opposite side of the watering hole. So when the wildebeest is running AWAY from the roar into what they think is safety, they are actually running straight into an ambush. If they would have run TOWARD the roar, as counterintuitive and frightening as it may seem, they would actually be able to scamper away into safety. The male lion's "bark" is much more dangerous than his bite. Scripture says that our enemy, Satan, prowls around like a ROARING lion, seeking whom he could devour. The reality is if you are a Christian, you are not in danger of being devoured by the enemy. He has no claim over your life. You are a new creation, and no longer a slave to the curse of sin and death. But the enemy can scare you into being devoured by pain and fear. In fact, his intention is to steal, kill and destroy. He wants to steal your joy, kill your hope, and destroy the purposes God has for your life. What people will often do when they encounter a trial, a tragedy, or a painful experience is they will try to run away from the pain. Pain is terrifying. It's messy. It sneaks up on you and can cripple you in an instant. It knocks the breath out of you. But it can't kill you. Most people are fearful of stepping into the pain, letting*

their heart feel the full weight of it, working through it, and giving it over to the Lord. It makes you feel too exposed and vulnerable. And so they never actually come to a place of healing. So what people try to do is box up the pain. They run away from it. The only problem is that by doing so they are running straight into an ambush. Months, years, even decades down the road it will ambush them and take them out. When you try to box it up, it traps you later – this time with even more ferocity...Perhaps the greatest example of running toward the roar we were faced with recently was going back into my house where Amanda was killed. As much as I didn't want to step back into that living room where I found her, I knew I couldn't keep that boxed up. The morning I returned, I put worship music in my earbuds, laid down in the spot I found her, wept, prayed and worshipped. And I'll tell you, something miraculous happened. About 45 minutes of running toward the roar and I was better. I had released it all. The darkness that, in my mind, had hovered over that location was now taken captive by a risen Savior and I wasn't afraid of it anymore. Initially when you run toward the roar it's excruciating; but eventually it's healing...Maybe that's why Psalm 30 talks about God turning our mourning into dancing. In order to feel the joy of dancing on the other side you must be willing to step into the sting of mourning. So what roar do you need to run toward today?"

We live by faith in the facts of God's Word, not by our own feelings. Job ran toward the roar, and the roaring lion was left speechless. We can run toward the enemy's roar because behind us is the roar of the Lion of Tribe of Judah—the Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered and died and rose again for us that we through repentance and faith might live in His victory.

What if you experience tragedy to such a degree that you can't see how any good could come from the situation? What do you do when tragedy strikes? You do what Job did—trust God when it's dark. Worship God and trust Him. When you can't see how the storm cloud could ever have a silver lining, you can trust the One who sits sovereign above the clouds.