

INTRODUCTION

Bad days come in all shapes and sizes. The title of this message is “What to do when your world crumbles in.” Several people have commented to me that they thought this message title was in response to the terrible devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina five days ago. But the truth is I planned this series from Job months ago, and selected this message title for this date many weeks ago. There is no way any of us could have known that these past few days would be a time of unprecedented pain and suffering. But God knew.

This world is full of pain and suffering. From the cradle to the grave, there are things that happen that bring tears to our eyes. But the point of this series is that our tears can either obscure our vision of heaven, or they can be telescopes that help us see eternity. This world is filled with suffering, but there is another world that we can anticipate. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” (p. 120)

It’s been a bad week for a lot of people, but few people have ever had the kind of bad week Job suffered. If you missed the earlier messages, let me review the story. Job was a righteous guy who was blessed with great wealth and a wonderful family. At a gathering in heaven, Satan alleged before God that the only reason Job served God was because he was so blessed. Satan charged that if Job lost it all, he would curse God to His face. God knew Job’s heart, but in order to demonstrate for Satan and all the hosts of angels, both good and bad, God gave Satan permission to test his theory. Satan went to work—and Job suffered. But never lose sight of the conclusion of the story. Job endured all the pain and trials the devil tossed his way and never lost his faith. In the end, God restored to him MORE than he ever had in the first place.

Job 1:13-22. “One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, a messenger came to Job and said, ‘The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!’ While he was yet speaking, another messenger came and said, ‘The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!’ While he was yet speaking, another messenger came and said, ‘The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!’ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, ‘Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!’ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.”

Life has a way of crumbling in without warning. Job is the best model we have on how to deal with pain and suffering. From him we learn there are four important things to do when your

world crumbles in:

1. EXPRESS YOUR GRIEF HONESTLY

Job expressed his agonizing grief in three ways. It says in vs. 20 “he tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship.” The tearing of clothes was a customary way of expressing immediate grief in the ancient world. You’ve probably felt so much inner pain before that you wanted to tear something. Tearing cloth is a metaphor for a broken heart. There’s the strain of pulling, and the release when the cloth tears. Tearing his clothes was an immediate expression of his grief, but the shaving of his head was a long-term expression of his pain. Every time he felt his head, or felt the chill on his scalp he was reminded of his grief. As his hair grew out, it was also a gradual reminder to him that life goes on and with time, the pain lessens. Then he fell down; he collapsed. But he didn’t collapse into helplessness or hopelessness; he fell down to worship God.

When you’re hurting, it’s okay to express your grief. Moreover, it’s *important* to express your grief. Grief that is submerged and suppressed can lead to unhealthy emotional problems. To express your grief, you need to understand what grief is. There is an equation for grief that can be expressed this way: CHANGE + LOSS = GRIEF. Change is never easy, and some life changes are minor. But there are major changes in life in which we lose something precious and that creates grief.

Job’s life changed in one day when he experienced material and personal loss. He lost all his wealth in a single day. I checked the current price of livestock and according to today’s prices, Job’s livestock was worth over \$46 million. (Remember, he had 7,000 camels, and a good camel sells for \$15,000 in Saudi Arabia today.) It would be as if you lost your job, your bank account, your investments and your retirement account in one day.

Worse than his loss of \$46 million was his personal loss. His three daughters and seven sons were gathered in a house when a killer storm blew in. The walls of the building collapsed and they were all killed. On the heels of hearing of the loss of his wealth, Job learned his children were dead. His world came crumbling in.

Job didn’t deny his grief. He didn’t slap a fake smile on his face and flippantly say, “Everything is going to be okay.” He cried long and hard, but he never lost his faith in God. In chapter 16 Job admitted how deeply he was grieving. He said, “I have sewed sackcloth over my skin and buried my brow in the dust. My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes.” (Job 16:15-16)

When you lose something you grieve and the greater the sense of loss, the greater the depth of your grief. I’ve been told there is nothing to compare with the depth of grief over the death of a child. But death isn’t the only thing that causes grief. When you lose a job, you grieve. When you lose a mate through divorce or death, you grieve. When you lose a friend, or lose a house to fire or flood, or lose your freedom, you grieve. Whatever the nature of your loss, it’s important to express your grief honestly.

It doesn’t show a lack of faith to cry a river of tears. The Bible says Christians sorrow—but we

don't sorrow as those who have no hope. Even in the midst of our pain over loss, we have hope. Jesus was a Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. He wept out of compassion for Mary and Martha at their brother's grave even though He planned to resuscitate Lazarus. Jesus was so heartbroken over the sinful people in Jerusalem that He stood over a hill over looking the city and wept bitter tears. It's okay to grieve. In fact, it's good to grieve.

2. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT EVERY BLESSING IS A GIFT FROM GOD

Job acknowledged everything he had was a gift from God. He said in vs. 21: “The Lord gave...” You came into this world naked, and even though you may be buried in a \$500 suit, you'll enter the afterlife with zero material assets. You'll never see a U-Haul following the hearse in a funeral procession. You can't take it with you.

Some people think everything good in their life has come to them because they earned it. There are people who think society owes them a living, or that they deserve to have all their needs met. But the Bible teaches clearly everything good in life is a *gift* that comes from God above. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)

While everything in the world is changing, God doesn't change. The story of Job took place almost 4,000 years ago. The very same God who had a personal relationship with Job is the God who wants to have a personal relationship with you. He wants to give you the gift of life. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) Eternal life has nothing to do with how long you live—it's a gift that changes the whole quality of your life. When you have received God's gift of eternal life, it changes your entire outlook.

As you watch the news channels interview hundreds of the storm evacuees, you can usually pick out someone who knows the Lord. On Friday, Fox News interviewed an elderly lady who had just arrived at a shelter in Baton Rouge. She said she had lost everything. When the interviewer asked her if she was going to make it through this time, a beautiful smile broke out on her face and she said, “Oh, I'm going to make it through. In fact, with the Lord's help, I'm already there.”

Sadly, many people are like a hog grubbing for acorns at the foot of the oak tree, refusing to glance up and acknowledge the source of his food. We must look up to heaven and acknowledge that source of all good gifts.

As the song says, “When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed; When you are discouraged thinking all is lost; Count your many blessings; name them one by one; and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” (Words by Johnson Oatman Jr.)

3. ACCEPT THAT GOD MAY TAKE SOMETHING AWAY WITHOUT GIVING YOU A REASON

Verse 21. “and the Lord has taken away...” In the subsequent chapters, Job is going to ask the Lord some tough questions. He is going to ask “Why?” in a variety of ways, but he will never

receive an answer. Beginning in chapter 38, God starts speaking to Job but He never gives Job a reason for why these things happened. As far as we know, God never even let Job in on the deal with the devil. Instead, God spends four chapters reminding Job that His wisdom, greatness, and power is far beyond our ability to comprehend. If you think you deserve an answer to the question, “Why did this happen?” then your concept of God is too small. There will always be a sense of mystery and awe about Him.

In the book of Romans, Paul is writing about God’s plan for the ages and he breaks out in this observation, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?” (Romans 11:33-35)

When you’ve lost something or someone precious, it is easy to forget that “the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.” He doesn’t owe us a reason. John Claypool was a pastor in Louisville, Kentucky when I was in seminary. He and his wife lost their daughter, Laura Lou, to leukemia. He later explained his loss by telling a story from his childhood. During WWII his family didn’t own a washing machine, and since gas was rationed, they couldn’t afford to drive to a laundry. Keeping their clothes clean became a challenge. John’s neighbor went into the service and his wife moved in with her family. They offered to let John’s family use their Bendix wringer washer while they were gone. They reasoned it would be better for it to be used than to sit rusting on the porch.

John helped with the family’s laundry, and he said he developed a fondness for that old green Bendix. When the war ended his neighbors returned, and they reclaimed their washing machine.

Over the course of the war, young John had actually forgotten the machine was loaned to them, so when the neighbors removed it, John was upset and angry that they would take his washing machine. His mother sat him down and said, “John, you must remember that the washing machine never belonged to us in the first place. That we ever got to use it at all was a gift. So, instead of being mad at it being taken away, let us use this as an occasion to be thankful that we ever had it at all.”

John Claypool would say years later he struggled with the death of eight-year-old Laura Lou, until he remembered that old green Bendix. He wrote: “When I remember that Laura Lou was a gift, pure and simple, something I neither earned nor deserved nor had a right to; and when I remember that the appropriate response to a gift, even when it is taken away, is gratitude, then I am better able to try and thank God that I was ever given her in the first place.” (*Steps of a Fellow Struggler*) That’s exactly how Job felt. He knew every good thing in his life had come from God, and God had the right to take anything away. That’s the kind of attitude that will keep you from becoming bitter when you face loss.

4. OFFER PRAISE TO GOD: WHEN YOU DON’T FEEL LIKE IT, FAITH IT

Have you ever heard the advice, “Cheer up, things could be worse?” Job cheered up, and sure enough things got worse. In the next lesson we’re going to see how Job’s pain and suffering is

going to intensify as Satan attacks his health. But instead of assessing blame, Job chose to express praise to God in verse 21, “may the name of the Lord be praised.”

What do you think Job *felt* like doing? There was a Mrs. Job we’ll meet in Chapter 2. In Job 2:9 she told Job to “curse God and die.” That’s what she felt like doing, and Job probably shared her feelings. But Job didn’t live by feelings, he lived by faith. When you are hurting, you have to make the choice, by faith, to praise God. Don’t fake it—faith it.

It’s easy to offer praise to God when everything is wonderful in your life. But when you offer God praise in the midst of your pain, it becomes a precious sacrifice. The Bible says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” (Hebrews 13:15)

God taught me a lesson a few days ago from the strangest source. The other morning I was getting ready to shave and the label on the side of the can of shaving cream caught my attention. It said, “Caution, contents under pressure. Do not incinerate or puncture.” If you burn or puncture a can of shaving cream, the high pressure will cause the can to explode.

God used this label to remind me that it describes what a lot of people are going through these days. They are living under intense pressure and stress, and they may be only a few degrees away from an explosion. They can’t stand the heat and they don’t know how to get out of the kitchen. If you want to know what’s really inside a person, watch to see what comes out when they are under pressure. We’re seeing it right now in the ongoing relief effort. For some, this time of pressure has only led them to looting and lawlessness. That kind of behavior is disgusting, but it isn’t surprising. They only confirm the scripture that says in Jeremiah 17:9: “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?”

But what we’re seeing and will see over the next few weeks is an outpouring of love and concern on the part of kind Americans. Churches, companies, and individuals are going to open their doors, their hearts, and their wallets to share with people who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. They will be going the second and third miles to show compassion to thousands of people they’ve never even met before. Whatever is on the inside will come on under pressure—and there are millions of Americans who are filled with the love of God.

Remember, our God is the expert of bringing good out of evil. As hard as they’ve been trying, we’ve learned again our government relief agencies aren’t omnipotent. But we serve a God who is all-powerful and all-loving. He specializes in bringing order out of chaos and bringing good out of bad. Many of the folks who have been interviewed have said, “I’ve lost everything, my house, my car, my possessions, but Praise the Lord, I still have my life and my family.”

This raises the fundamental issue of the book of Job we must all consider: “If I lose everything that I hold dear, what’s left to sustain me?” If your sense of worth and happiness is defined by your possessions, then prepare to be devastated. But if your sense of worth and joy is based upon a living relationship with a loving God, there is NOTHING in this Universe that can separate you from the love of God.

CONCLUSION

So, when you're hurting, try following Job's example. Express your grief, honestly, don't suppress it. Acknowledge that every good gift in your life has come from God. Accept the fact that God has the right to take anything at any time—it's His world. And in the midst of your pain, even when you don't feel like it, offer praise to God.

There is one thing *not* to do when your world crumbles in: blame God. Notice the last words in chapter 1: “In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.” Whenever we suffer, we immediately look for someone to blame. If we can blame our suffering on our parents, our spouse, our co-workers or society in general, we can justify our bitterness, and it prevents us from moving on to becoming whole. And God gets blamed for a lot of suffering today. But in spite of his pain, and his unanswered questions, Job never charged that God was wrong.

Whenever you're going through a tough time, there's always the fear of the unknown. Job must have been afraid of what was ahead, but he put his trust firmly in God.

Before 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, the common belief was that if a ship from Europe sailed too far West, they would either fall off the edge of the world or face terrible danger. There was fear of the unknown. In England, there is an ancient nautical map dating back to the time of King Henry IV. On it, the mapmakers wrote these words over the Atlantic Ocean: “Here be dragons; Here be demons; Here be danger.” And based on those superstitious warnings, sailors were afraid of sailing there. But there was an English navigator named John Franklin who was a mighty man of God. He knew the Word of God that says God sits above the circle of the earth. He took that same map and crossed out those fearful words and added these three words: “HERE BE GOD!”

If you are a servant of God, you need to know that as you sail toward your darkest fears and deepest worries *here be God!* He is there to keep you and sustain you. Job discovered that. He was able to look through his tears and say: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.” (Job 19:25)

Dr. Judy Barnes is the Chairman of the Depart of Deaf Interpreting at Tyler Junior College, and a leader in our Deaf Ministry. She recently wrote a song summarizing the kind of faith that sustains you when your crumbles in: “When the world comes tumbling down—there is Jesus. When there's trouble all around, He cares. Through the toil and pain and strife, He's my strength, my joy, my life. When the world comes crashing down—He's there.”

Our Universe is so large scientists can't measure it. But the Bible says in Isaiah 40:12 that God measures the heavens with the span of His hand. So, when your world crumbles in, the most important thing you can do is to simply place yourself in God's hands. The safest place in this Universe is in His hands. Don't ever forget those powerful words you learned as a child: “He's got the whole world in His hands; He's got the whole wide world in His hands!”

OUTLINE

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"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?" *Romans 11:33-35*

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"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name." *Hebrews 13:15*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes