

Last week, I introduced you to the story of Kelly Lemon. She was an ordinary 12 year old girl looking forward to a normal life. But then her family was involved in a serious car accident where Kelly lost the use of her right arm and other muscles. She began the journey of multiple doctor's visits, surgeries and therapies that aimed to help her recover.

In May 2008, Kelly had major spinal cord surgery to reduce her nerve pain with the hope of bringing some feeling back to her right arm. But the surgery failed and her nerve pain increased dramatically. Kelly shares about her response to God in those days. "I asked, 'God, what was the point of that? How did that strengthen my testimony? I could have dealt with the surgery failing and no improvement, but why did you allow the surgery to intensify the pain to the degree that it did? I had nerve pain before and that impacted my testimony; now I still have the same story, except that I am living with more pain."

There was another time when Kelly felt tingling in her left hand. Then fingers began to grow numb. Then the numbness extended up her arm. Then one evening after teaching snowboarding, she could not feel her left arm. She told herself that it was frozen from the cold and everything would be okay when her arm warmed up. So she got home and went into the shower. But as she tried to lift her left arm she realized she could do nothing with it. It just flopped to her side. She slid down the shower wall and sat on the floor crying out – "God, you have already taken one arm and countless muscles in my body, please ... please don't take my left arm! Don't ... don't take it. You say you only give us what we can handle, and I can't handle having no arms! You've finally reached the limit of what I can take. I want to do things for your kingdom; please let me keep one hand!" Kelly's bad circumstances had worsened. How would she respond to God now?

I spent time as a camp pastor at Bonnechere camp in Ontario when we pastored there. We went several years in a row. So we got to know the staff who worked that particular week from year to year. One year, I noticed a family missing from the kitchen staff. I asked another lady of the staff about this family. They shared that they had lost their teenage son in a car accident and were still dealing with that. The lady shared with me said the Mom was so grief stricken she couldn't even sing in church and she had a beautiful voice. That family never returned to serve in the kitchen. But a couple years later, I asked this same lady how that family was doing. Her eyes welled up with tears. She

said they *were* doing fine. The Mom was just starting to sing again in church. Then a second son was involved in another accident and died from his wounds. So now they faced life having lost 2 sons to accidental death.

Something similar might happen in our lives or the life of someone we love. Maybe we were told all the symptoms that could accompany a doctor's diagnosis. But only 10% of people get all those symptoms. And you ended up being in the 10%. Or we endured a particularly difficult situation and had made our peace with God. We thanked Him for seeing us through that great time of trouble. We later admit to others that we were at our breaking point. If one more thing happened we might have lost our faith. But then 2 more things happen. And we're worse off than we ever bargained we would be.

Life sometimes goes from bad to worse. When that happens, how do we respond to God? We're going to find out how one man responded to God today as we continue to follow the account of Job. Last week in chapter 1 we saw that Job enjoyed a good life of multiple children, great wealth and great joy. Yet in a matter of hours he loses everything. His children and flocks are destroyed. His servants are murdered and he is ruined. It all happened because the satan asked permission to afflict Job this way to prove that the only reason Job praised God was because of these blessings. Upon receiving the terrible news, Job goes into mourning. Yet He continues to worship the Lord. If anyone suffered what Job suffered, we would say it couldn't get much worse. But we're about to find out that it did. As we travel through the next part of this story I invite you to participate by asking yourself how you might respond to God if things went from bad to worse in your life. We will see how things worsened in Job's life. We will discover some obstacles to continuing trust in God when things worsen. But we will also discover what God provided to assure us through times of deepening adversity. I pray that God will use this to help some of us get unstuck in our walk with God or be able to reach out in trusting Him again despite what we've been through.

### **Job 2:1-8**

**2** Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. <sup>2</sup>And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." <sup>3</sup>And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." <sup>4</sup>Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. <sup>5</sup>But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

<sup>7</sup>So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. <sup>8</sup>And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

How did things go from bad to worse for Job? **The satan afflicted him with loathsome sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.** But how did that happen? Didn't God limit the satan's ability to do that in chapter 1? Yes. But chapter 2 begins with another scene from heaven. Again the sons of God come to present themselves before the supreme God, the Lord. Again, the narrator points out that the satan was among them. The Lord addresses him the same way asking where he has been. The satan responds the same way as in chapter 1. Then the Lord brings up Job. "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?" So the Lord's estimation of Job has not changed one bit from the first scene. Job continues to remain faithful despite this great tragedy in his life. But then God adds another piece to his description of Job.

"He still holds fast to his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Remember the satan's prediction from chapter 1? If you take away Job's blessings, he will curse you to your face." This did not happen. So how will the satan respond to this?

"Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The satan argues that when it really comes down to it, every man will give up much around him as long as it doesn't cost him his own life. We don't really know what "skin for skin" means. We can't really find it as a popular saying of the day. Some suggest it means that Job would be willing to trade the skin of others (like his children and servants) to save his own skin. But Job was never asked to trade their lives for his. It just happened.

Another suggestion is that the satan refers to an outer skin and an inner skin. He accused God of placing a hedge of protection around Job in chapter 1. Now the hedge of wealth, joy and children has been removed. But Job still enjoys the hedge or protection of his own skin. He's healthy. Though grieving, he hasn't been physically struck with some disease or illness. Perhaps the satan charges that you don't really know the faithfulness of a man or woman to God until they themselves have been attacked or suffered loss of health or body.

The Lord again permits the satan to act within boundaries. "Behold, he is in your hand. Only spare his life." With great eagerness, the adversary heads out and personally strikes Job with loathsome sores. It could have been

blisters or tumors or boils. We don't know. But we do know it covered Job's body from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head. Job could not dress to cover up these blights. He likely couldn't walk straight because of the sores on his feet. He couldn't even stay in town because in those days, if you had a noticeable physical illness, they assumed you were contagious. So you were cast out of where everyone else lived. He now stays in the rubbish area. In ancient towns, they burned their garbage constantly. So there were these big ash heaps. Outcasts would go to these places to find food or bits of clothing or something to survive on. Job finds a piece of broken pottery there and scrapes his skin with it. Somehow, this brings him a small measure of relief.

So before chapter 2, Job at least was able to mourn in his house. He at least still could sleep in his own bed without physical discomfort. He at least could still engage in fellowship with the community even though he had been struck down terribly. But now he's isolated even more and endures physical suffering on top of his emotional pain. Surely this is the bottom of the barrel.

But things get worse. **Job 2:9-10**

<sup>9</sup>Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die."<sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"<sup>[a]</sup> In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job's adversity increases when his wife shows up to see him. We aren't told any of what she went through. Likely she's in as deep mourning as he. She too may have continued to worship the Lord despite this great loss. But now seeing her husband suffer this latest indignity is too much for her. So she makes a decision that many of us have made or may have to make for a loved one. We conclude death is better than continuing life like this. I believe she really acted out of compassion. She did not want her husband to suffer like this anymore. But in her advice to him, she becomes an unwitting messenger of the adversary. So Job's situation has just worsened. **Job's wife encourages him to give in to the Satan's temptation.** She encourages Job to "Curse God and die." The satan predicted Job would curse God to His face.

Now why would she say this? If she was a faithful woman of God, why would she encourage her husband to curse the one she'd trusted for so long? It could be that she was so embittered at that moment that she expresses her own frustration in her advice to Job. Or she may have been counseling him to curse God to hasten death. It was a

common belief that if you cursed God, it would not be long before he struck you dead. So here was an attempt to intervene and lessen her husband's suffering. But in so doing, she has invited him to in some way deny his Lord.

Job refuses. Instead, he charges her with talk like one of the foolish women. This does not mean he was calling her stupid. Throughout wisdom literature, a fool was someone who denied God's existence. So a foolish man or woman acted and talked like God did not exist. Job rebukes her for that. He seems to rebuke her for thinking she can in some way play with God. Instead, he makes another great statement of faith – "shall we receive good from God and not trouble or evil?" So Job's health has deteriorated quickly. He's now an outcast in his village. He's had a conflict with his wife who unwittingly became a means of temptation. Yet he has not sinned with his lips. Things can't get any worse until his three friends show up.

### **Job 2:11-13**

<sup>11</sup>Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. <sup>12</sup>And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. <sup>13</sup>And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

At first glance, it looks like these guys had very noble intentions. They hear about Job's troubles. They make an appointment to meet together and come to sympathize with him. They want to comfort him. But when they see him, they act in ways that were not sure about. First, they enter into mourning. That might be appropriate if they join him in mourning for his children. Then they tear their robes which was an obvious sign of mourning. They sprinkle dust on their heads. But the regular way was to place ashes on your head; they throw dust up in the air to the heavens. The only other reference we have in the Old Testament to such an action is when Moses threw soot from a kiln in the air and it came down as the plague of boils on the Egyptians. Scholars have not come to a definitive conclusion on what this means.

But then things get even more strange. They sit on the ground with him for 7 days and 7 nights. Sitting on the ground could be identifying with him and his circumstances. But verse 13 states. They did not say a word "to him." So

it was not necessarily completely silent for 7 days and nights. They may have been talking to one another. They may have talked to Job's wife and other people in the town. But not one word to him?

We're not sure exactly what's going on. But it seems like **The three friends treat Job as if He was already dead.** Let's add up all the factors. They immediately cry out with loud voices of mourning when they see him. They tear their robes. They sit down for 7 days which was the appointed mourning period for someone deceased. They don't talk to him. It's like a family gathered around the bedside of a dying unconscious loved one. They talk to each other but not the one dying. David Clines writes - It is possible, of course, that mourning rituals were appropriate for one in great distress. But it is hard to avoid the impression that such a way of showing grief would be experienced as alienating. For he is not yet dead; and although, when he opens his mouth, he will say that to be dead is his dearest desire, it must have been so stark to see this fate externalized in the ritual behavior of his friends. It is one thing to know one has an incurable illness, it is another to witness the reaction of friends to the news.

We don't know for sure. Nor do we know if their arrival brought him any comfort initially. But we do know that Job's adversity and life situation has worsened since the beginning of Job 2. Daniel Estes writes "Adversity has physical, social and emotional dimensions. The physical aspects are most obvious. His skin is disfigured by sores that cover him from head to toe. Socially, he is consigned to live with the outcasts among the ashes of the city dump, cut off from the honor and esteem he has previously enjoyed in the community. Emotionally, he feels abandoned even by his family. Finally, his wife, calls into question Job's persistence in holding on to God. Adversity often strikes us on several fronts simultaneously."

Sometimes the same thing happens to us. We would hope that we would respond with a similar faith like Job expressed here. But there are sometimes obstacles in our way that hinder our ability to connect with the Lord. I have called them false beliefs or conclusions. Each one must be addressed for us to draw near to the Lord when things get worse. False Beliefs prevent us from trusting God through worsening times.

### **False beliefs that block our turning to God**

**False Belief 1 - God is cruel.** When things go from bad to worse, we can conclude that God is cruel. Wasn't God cruel to allow the Satan to afflict Job's health? We can go down that path when our troubles mount higher and higher. John Walton writes "We must never allow ourselves to believe that God is cruel. Job's response is appropriate. "Should we

accept good from God and not trouble?” This is true regardless of whether we can identify cause. God acted against Job without cause. Without responding to something but Job did. Does God sometimes act against us without cause (justification?) Does this make him cruel? Or should we sometimes seek understanding of God’s actions, not in light of just cause, but in light of wise purpose?

**True Belief 1 - Though trouble comes, this does not mean God is cruel.**

God is at work at His greater & deeper purpose.

Michael Horton notes “In permitting evil, God does not simply let it happen but determines how far he will let it go and how he will overcome it for good.” Horton – 358 “God can be considered neither the author of evil nor the passive spectator of evil. He only actively determines to permit evils that he has already, at great personal cost, determined to overcome for his greater glory and our ultimate good.” Horton – 359 “We must never forget that the place where the triumph of evil seemed so obvious and God’s saving care seemed most hidden was at the cross. And yet the opposite was true. Horton – 363; Calvin, Institutes, 3.8.1. God has much greater purposes at work that we may never see until eternity. But He is not cruel. He continues to overcome evil and work things for good in the lives of those who love Him.

But Walton cautions us against thinking we can completely nail down God’s involvement in suffering. *What vocabulary should we use to describe God’s involvement? I would suggest that one of the major lessons of the book of Job is that no such language suffices. Whenever we choose a verb to communicate God’s relationship to suffering, we propose what can only be a simplistic understanding of what God does. Simplistic generalizations lead to flawed theology because God’s role is beyond our comprehension and beyond our powers of explanation. Job’s conclusion happened to be right—his circumstances were from the hand of God. But it would be simplistic and inaccurate for us to characterize all suffering as coming directly from the hand of God..<sup>1</sup>*

Kelly Lemon: It has been a process of growth. I am still learning and being stretched when it comes to God’s involvement in my suffering. The accident happened over a decade ago, so I have gone through different stages in regards to my view on suffering and God’s involvement. I have experienced times of anger, periods of confusion, and times of sorrow, curiosity, and joy. I do trust that God has a plan, but there are times where I have been confused as to what I am supposed to learn from it. The car accident is something that God allowed and for which I can praise him

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<sup>1</sup> Walton, J. H., & Vizcaino, K. L. (2012). *The NIV Application Commentary: Job*. (T. Muck, T. Longman III, R. Hubbard, J. H. Walton, A. Dearman, S. N. Gundry, ... V. Verbrugge, Eds.) (pp. 99–116). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

because I can see the fruit that has come from it. It is hard to praise him for the pain I am experiencing, when I can't see his purpose in it. Yet we are not guaranteed explanations. Even though I know God's will is better than my own, there are still some things I wrestle with and ask God about." Yes Kelly's extreme pain continues. But she did regain the use of her left arm.

**False Belief 2 - I could do it better than God.**

Walton writes - When life takes a turn for the worse, it is easy to blame God and to question what he is doing. It is easy for us to believe that he is making a mess of things and that we could do a better job of it, given the chance.

Whenever we raise questions about God's justice, we tacitly (quietly) suggest that if we were given the chance, we would be more just. When we question God's love, we imply that we could be more loving. His grace, his mercy, his patience. . . If we think we can do them better than God, we have a defective view of God (not to mention an unrealistic conceit and a superficial and simplistic knowledge of the problem). Talk to most people and they conclude only an ogre of a God would limit salvation to only those who happened to hear of Jesus and accept it.

**True Belief 2 - The most competent person in the universe still remains in charge.** You couldn't do it better. Only the divine playwright knows the whole story. (Horton)

**False Belief 3 - God must give me all the information.**

We might think that if God told us everything that was going on or the reasons why things were happening, then we would be alright. "Just explain to me why God and I will be okay." But has God, in His infinite and great wisdom every revealed everything to humans? Revelation is not exhaustive. Our theology does not provide ironclad answers for every question. Where revelation is silent and the logic of our theology fails, we do not reach a dead end. This is where faith begins.

Will not the Judge of the earth do right? Of course he will. We don't have to worry that God is less fair, less just, less merciful, less loving or less gracious than we would be. The "if I only knew more" option always falls short of letting God be God. This is our faith. We never have all the information to whatever issue is at hand.

**True Belief 3 - Though we don't have all the information, we have all we need in God Himself.** It's kind of like flying. Do we have all the information when we fly? Do we know the maintenance report? Do we know the minor issues the pilot and copilot had to address prior to take off? Do we know about that one passenger who has a pacemaker and has



to be watched carefully by staff? Do we know about the storm that could affect our flight path? Did we receive an explanation as to how planes fly and then how airplane engines work? No. But we still fly despite having so little of the complete information. Even in that situation, no one has all the information. The pilot might not know about specific needs of passengers. The air traffic controller might not know about the maintenance report. The ground crew doesn't know the name of every passenger. The food preparation people didn't see a picture of everyone who was coming on the plane. Yet each of these contributed in some way to ensuring the flight happened and people arrived at their destination.

But we serve the only person in the universe who knows everything. Everything! He knows everything about the purposes behind our adversity and suffering. He carries the deep knowledge that we cannot bear. He is working it together for His ultimate purposes and for our good. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to His purpose. "

Michael Horton – It is important for Christians to recognize that while God's saving will in Christ, once hidden, is now revealed to everyone through the proclamation of the gospel, God's hand of providence, even in the lives of believers, remains largely hidden." Therefore, we can continue to trust and have faith in the one who knows everything and reveals to us only what we need to know to travel through whatever we face. With these true beliefs, we can move towards the Lord again even when things get worse. But our greatest hope comes from the cross.

### **The cross brings us the greatest hope**

Christopher Ash writes -\_Job in his extremity is actually but a shadow of a reality more extreme still. There was a man who was not just blameless but sinless, who was not just the greatest man in the region, but the greatest human being in history, greater even than merely human. This man did not just go outside the city to the ash heap and sit down. He went outside the city to a hill of execution and was raised up for everyone to see a degrading, naked, shameful death on the cross. This man's journey took him from eternal fellowship with the Father to utter aloneness on the cross. The story of Job is a shadow of the greater story of Jesus Christ.

Michael Horton writes – 371 – How do we know that God works all things together for our salvation, even in the midst of awful circumstances to the contrary? Not because we see their resolution here and now or can grasp their resolution in our intellectual vision, but because we have heard God’s promise. And this promise is already confirmed by the fact that at the cross, the moment of the greatest injustice, when God seemed to be most hidden and absent, God was most active and victorious. The same is true in our lives when things go from bad to worse.

So as we close today, I invite you to come before God. Maybe you need to admit a false belief. You need to ask the Holy Spirit to expose that and teach you truth. Maybe you’re confused. You need to come and rest in the arms of the most competent person in the universe. Maybe you’ve been drifting or lost for years. You need to call out to Christ for the first time as your savior. Maybe you know someone who has been struggling greatly with God because things have gone from bad to worse. Pray for them now and resolve to share with them the truths from Job 2 and the hope of the cross.