



TIME OF GRACE®

God's Nonanswer Is The Answer?

Study Notes

Summary

At the very end of the book of Job, God shows up to talk to Job, who needed an answer to why he had to suffer and endure such unfathomable pain. But spoiler alert: Job never gets an answer. That's because, Pastor Mike says, we need to remember who we are and who God is.

- When life is hard, we need a _____.
- **Job 38:1-3** — Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ²“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? ³Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.
- **Job 38:4** — ⁴“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.
- **Job 38:18** — ¹⁸Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.
- **Job 38:21** — ²¹Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!
- **Job 40:3-5** — ³Then Job answered the LORD ⁴“I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. ⁵I spoke once, but I have no answer— twice, but I will say no more.”

- **Job 40:6-8** — ⁶ Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ⁷ “Brace yourself like a man; I will question you and you shall answer me. ⁸ “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?”
- **Job 42:1-6** — Then Job replied to the LORD: ² “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³ You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴ “You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ ⁵ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. ⁶ Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
- The Key: You know _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Re-read Job 38-42, and write your personal answers to all of God’s questions for Job. How did you score? What does your score tell you about you? About God? About suffering?
2. How might you share what you have learned about suffering with the people that you know that are currently in pain? Study 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 for inspiration.

Homework for Next week

Colossians 3:13, Matthew 18:21-22, Matthew 6:14-15

Time of Grace Ministry
Seriously, God? God's Nonanswer Is The Answer?
Job 38-42
June 2, 2024

Pastor Mike Novotny

Last Friday, I got to have a conversation with a guy I had never met before. Someone who watches our church services online. I had given him my number. I picked up on the phone on a Friday afternoon, and before I hung up the phone, I found out that this guy and I had an uncanny amount of things in common. I'd asked him in the course of the conversation where his hometown was, and his answer was the exact same place where I had grown up. I asked him, "What year did you graduate high school?" And his answer was the exact year I graduated high school. I said, "you didn't play soccer, did you?" And it turns out that this guy and I, 20/ 25 years ago, that's crazy to say now, were literally on the same soccer field playing against each other. We had this insane amount of things in common, except for one big thing.

As soon as I hung up the phone of that conversation, it was a Friday afternoon, I was off back to my house where my wife was waiting with dinner and our weekly Friday date night. When he hung up the phone, he was about to continue sitting in a very quiet house because his young wife had just died. Out of the blue. No one saw it coming. Something went wrong. One moment she's here, they're making plans for the future, and then just like that, gone. Now, I obviously can't share a lot about the conversation he and I had, but I think it's safe to say that the questions he asked me, the reason he wanted to talk to a pastor he didn't even know, was because he was wondering the exact same thing that I would have been wondering if I was him.

He was wondering, why. "Pastor, why did this happen? Out of all the people in the world, my wife was an amazing person, why her? Out of all the couples in the world, we were happy together, not every couple is, why us?" His heart was aching, craving an explanation for the tragedy that had happened. He was wondering why? It's the most natural question in the world when you're in pain, isn't it?

In fact, if you're taking notes here or taking notes at home, I'd love for you to write this down, because I think it's so true of your heart, of my heart and of this poor man's heart, that when life is hard, we need a why. I might not know you personally, but I bet I could predict this, that you have been able to get through some really, really difficult seasons of life, some really hard times, as long as you had a good reason why. Not every person turns on God, shakes their fists at the heavens, questions their faith altogether because life is hard. As long as there's a reason why.

Or you ladies who have brought babies into this world, I mean, I don't want to make you relive the trauma, but you remember it? The morning sickness and the feet that

kind of swell up and the clothes that don't fit. You're trying to sleep, you're trying to find the right comfortable position while the kid who looks so cute in the 4D ultrasound, it's like an MMA fighter punching the inside of your uterus. And you physically -- the physics of this baffle me, you physically push the child out of your body. And yet so if you did that and you didn't lose your faith, it's because there's a good reason why. We can get through hard seasons of life like labor pain, agonizing, suffering as long as there's a good enough reason. As long as we understand why.

And that's actually what makes life so difficult, right? Because we get the pain of education, and we get the pain of athletics, and we get the pain of childbirth. But sometimes we go through things in life that don't have such an obvious explanation. Some of you haven't called me up on the phone, like that guy from last Friday. But you've wondered the same things. Why would this happen? And out of all the people in the world, why did it have to happen to me, right? For some of you, that goes way back to childhood. Like, "Why wasn't dad there? Why did he create you and then not want to raise you?" You didn't do anything wrong. Some kids have amazing families, parents who are together, but why not you? Or some of you had fathers who were there and maybe you wish they weren't. They were physically aggressive. They were emotionally distant. They were supposed to be this little glimpse of our father in heaven, but they were just the opposite.

You see some kids playing catch with their dad in the backyard, but that wasn't your childhood. Why? Some kids do fine in school. It's like they show up without studying for the test and they ace it, but you're the kid who struggled to read, to understand, to remember. You're always behind even though you put in the effort. Why is that? Some people never have to deal with anxiety in their whole lives, right? They put their head on their pillow and they fall asleep. But that's not all of you. And you wonder, why? "I pray about this, God, all the time. Why doesn't this just go away?"

We could add to the questions, right? Why is depression part of some of our stories? Why are there car accidents and cancer? Why do some of our parents, and grandparents, and best friends die young? Why do some of us want love but we can't find it? Or we think we found love and then it slips through our fingers? Or we take our vows, for better or worse, and then the vows are broken? We want to have children, but we can't. "God, just tell me a reason why and I can get through it." That's the problem, right?

As I mentioned to some of you who were here last week, the honest truth is that we don't know why. I mean that guy called me up, I tried to listen, I tried to offer some scripture to him, but at the end of the day, his basic visceral question, "Why did this happen to me?" I don't know. And that's the struggle with some of our pain. We need a why, but we can't find it. There's only one person who really knows why life is the way it is, and we don't exactly get a one-on-one conversation with him.

But that's what makes the book of Job so absurdly fascinating. At the very end of the book of Job, this Old Testament book about pain and suffering, God, the only one who knows why, shows up to talk to Job, the one who needed an answer why. If you

know the story, the book of Job is 42 chapters long. For about 35 of those chapters, Job and his friends are arguing about why this is happening. Is Job bad? Is God bad? They can't figure it out. It's a total mess. So, in chapter 38 through chapters 42, God comes down and has a face-to-face conversation with his dear friend Job. And what happens in that conversation is not at all what you would expect. But if you or someone that you love is suffering deeply, it's exactly what you need.

So, today we're going to fly through the last five chapters of the book of Job as we search for the question, we all want answered, why? Let's kick things off in Job chapter 38:1. The scripture says, "Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said, 'Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man. I will question you and you shall answer me.'" Oh, God shows up in a storm. Have you ever gotten caught in a fierce storm before? Like, you might feel like a pretty cool kid on campus, you might be rocking it with a six-figure salary and the corner suites, you might be the best athlete on the field, but I don't care who you are, have you ever gotten caught in a fierce storm? Skies turn black, rain comes down. I mean, you could be inside your safe home when that lightning flashes and the thunder cracks, and that's kind of the point. God shows up, not as a little baby but in the midst of a fierce storm.

He wants to remind Job, before he says a word about the point he is just about to make. And just in case Job didn't pick up on the meaning, God says this, "Brace yourself like a man." "You bring your helmet today, Job? You got your cup? You're going to need it. You've been asking me a lot of questions, you and your friends have had a lot of words, now it's my turn. I am going to question you, and you shall answer me." And I won't read you every verse that comes next. But for the next two chapters, God intellectually eviscerates Job. I went through my Bible and encircled every question mark. And in Job 38 through 42, I found 77 separate questions that God asks Job. He booms question after question giving Job this pop quiz on how much he actually knows about the way the world works. And Job, Job doesn't do so well. He scores a zero out of 77. If he would have been in fourth grade, he would have missed his next recess to study again for the test.

Let me give you just a little glimpse of the kind of questions that God asked Job. He says in 38:4, "Job where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand." A few verses later he says, "Job, have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me if you know all this." A few verses later, he says, "Job, surely you know, for you are already born. You have lived so many years." That's God being sarcastic, by the way. And God keeps going. He says, "Job, do you know how storms work? Can you predict their path better than the best meteorologist?" And Job stares up at the storm. "How about Ostriches?" God says to Job, "Do you know why they work the way they do? Why they're shaped the way that they are? Why they run fast, because I do."

Question after question after question. First ten, then 30, then 50, then 70, then 77 times in a row, Job does this... Note that God has not told him why he lost his health, or his wealth, or his sons, or his daughters. God has just shown Job time and time

again that he maybe doesn't know quite as much as he thought. And so, here's Job's response as we flip the page to chapter 40. "Then Job answered the Lord, 'I am unworthy. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer. Twice, but I will say no more.'" As Job stares up at the storm, as he thinks a little more critically about what he knows and how much God knows, he realizes that he is not worthy to judge God. He's not worthy to demand a reason from God. He actually clasped his hand over his mouth and said, "I spoke once but I'm not going to do it again."

But apparently God wasn't done. At this point, if I was God, I would say, "Well, good Job. I'm glad you get it." That's not what God does. Next verse, chapter 40:6, "Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. 'Brace yourself like a man. I will question you and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?'" Job, in his pain and suffering, is questioning the God who loved him, who made him, who blessed him. He doesn't understand the reasons why. So now he's questioning the very heart of God. He's discrediting his kindness and love. He's actually condemning God for not being as loving as he claimed to be.

So, God gets big. He says, "Job, I'm trying to help you. Sin is corrupting your heart and I have to remind you that I am God and you are not." That's why in the next two chapters, God starts round two. This time, he doesn't pepper Job with as many questions as he previously did. He instead gives two examples of these immense beasts that would terrify Job. They're called, in chapter 40, The Behemoth and in chapter 41, The Leviathan. Now, if you read the descriptions in these chapters, it kind of seems like one is a massive mega crocodile and the other is a fierce, aggressive hippopotamus. Some people think actually they seem bigger than that. They might be extinct species that were like a super croc on steroids. Some people actually think these are maybe like mythical descriptions of some huge beasts that Job could never fight against.

But God's point is this, "Job, if you came face to face with these two beasts, you would feel very, very small. But when these two beasts come face to face with me, they feel very, very small. You've been questioning me like I'm your equal, like you have the right to judge me, let me give you an example to prove that you are not." You should read these chapters after church. Here's my favorite line that God says. He says, "Job, can you make a pet of this beast like a bird? Can you put it on a leash for the young women in your house?" It's like saying, "Would you like a crocodile for a pet?" Would you let it sleep on the end of your bed? No, you'd be terrified. But God is like, "It doesn't bother me. Would you stick a fierce, aggressive hippo in a little swimming pool with your sons, your daughters? Put it on a leash, walk it around the block?" God said, "Because I can. I'm God. I'm not you Job. I'm bigger, I'm stronger, I'm better. I'm holier. I know more. I can do more. I love more. You are not like me. I am God. And you are not."

And it works. We finally get down to Job 42, the last chapter of the book, and here's how Job replies. "Then Job replied to the Lord, 'I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans

without knowledge?' Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak. I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'"

Job repents. That's the Bible's way of saying he changed directions. He was thinking this and then he's like, "No, no, no, no. Now, I think that." You can read the conclusion of the story. In this little epilogue, God shows up and sets things straight. He restores Job's health, he gives him back his wealth, in fact, twice as much. He blesses him with a new family, sons, daughters. And then the last verse of the book of Job, he dies an old man and full of years, and best of all, he is filled with faith and love for God.

But here's the fascinating part, he never gets an answer. God doesn't show up and say, "Okay, I'm God. You're not. And now Job, here's my playbook. Here's this conversation you didn't hear between me and Satan. Here's exactly why I let that happen. Here's how I'm going to use your story for generations to come to help people who are suffering." God never once says a word about any of it. He just shows up and says, "God." And that was good for Job. He said, "My ears had heard of you, God. I thought I knew you, but now my eyes have seen you. And so, I repent because seeing you, just remembering who, that's enough."

Friends, that is a profound lesson for you and I today. We think that we need a reason why. We think that if God would just say this or that, just explain why this path and not that one. But it's not true. According to the story of a man who suffered much more intensely than any of us will likely suffer we don't need a why. We just need to remember who.

You might think I'm being repetitive if you were here for last week's message but write this down. It's actually a two-part answer. The key is to remember who and Who. If you're just listening to this on a podcast. You need to know 'who' with a small 'W.' And you need to remember 'Who' with a capital 'W.' The ending of the Book of Job is about remembering who you are and Who God is. And if you remember those two things, then you won't need an answer to that big question, why?

So, let's start with the first one. Who, as in you, as in me. Do you know who you are? Do you know who I am? I'm a 41-year-old man who doesn't remember what he had for breakfast three days ago. I'm a middle-aged guy who, despite all of his education, when they asked me to verify my username and password, I have no idea. I spend about two hours a week just guessing which of the passwords goes with this account, right? What do you and I know about ourselves? Or the world? Or the way the universe works? Or the plan -- You know, we might feel big when we compare ourselves to our classmates, and coworkers, and family members. But when you really think about it, what do we know about life? Some of you know when you're trying to raise kids right? You're trying to teach a one-year-old who's just asking, "No, why?" They're fighting with you all the time. "I know more than you. Because I said." The gap between you and a one-year-old is nothing compared to the gap

between us and God. It's like the gap between Job and those two beasts, and the beasts and God. God is so, so much bigger.

And friend, it's not because we're unintelligent. Some of you have doctorates, master's degrees, you're street smart. But we are just people. It's like we look at life through this little straw, and God sees the panoramic picture. And so, before we get all big and start questioning the love of God and thinking, "He must not have a good enough reason. I don't get why this is happening." Of course, you don't. You're you. So, before you demand a reason why, God's humbling answer is, "Let's not forget Who." You and I are small. Some of you will have great grandchildren who won't even know your name. You are not a big deal, and neither am I. And remembering that fact might just help you hold on to your faith when life is hard.

Job said, "I repent. I despise myself for saying what I said. I repent in dust and ashes because I spoke of things I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me to know." So, first of all, remember who you are. But even better, number two, remember who God is. He is the God of the mightiest storm. He is the creator of the Behemoth and the controller of the Leviathan. He is the God, according to Jesus, who knows the number of hairs on your head, he doesn't have to guess. He knows every time a sparrow falls and dies. He has a name for every star when you stare up at the sky like Job saying... He knows all of it.

And best of all, he did not use his knowledge to gloat. He used his character as God to save. To save very small people, incredibly sinful people. God used his bigness to bless us. That's who God is. I don't know why. I do know who I am. I don't know why. I do know Who he is. The next time the devil messes with your faith, "Why is this happening?" I don't know why. I know who I am, a sinner. No, I don't know why. But I know Who he is, my Savior. Remember who and you won't need a why. Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you so much for your amazing grace and mercy. We can't see in this moment what you see, because you see to the end of the story. You see all these things that the enemy means for evil and how you are going to turn them for good. God, if we had the answer, we would trust you completely. But God, for some reason you don't reveal it, but we still want to trust you completely. Fix our eyes on Jesus, who came into this world to give his life for us, to prove what kind of God you are. Help us to remember, as you say in the book of Romans, that, if you are the God who did not spare your only son, but gave him up for us all, how will you not graciously, along with Jesus, give us what we need.

And so, God, we don't need an answer, we just need more of you. So, open the eyes of our heart to see you like Job saw you. Help us to grasp as we look around at the glories of nature, and especially as we see the brilliant things in your Word, what kind of God you are. A God whose mercy is more. A God of unfailing compassion. A Jesus Christ who is our cornerstone. You're all we need, God. Help us to remember that. Help us to worship our way through this struggle, through this valley, until we see you face to face. God, we hold on to you today because you are worthy of it. We ask this all in the mighty, powerful name of Jesus. And God's people say, amen.