

STRETCH YOURSELF: YOUR FAITHFULNESS

Job

INTRODUCTION:

***1** In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.*

Thus begins one of the most familiar stories in all of literature. But please do not misunderstand: when I refer to this as a familiar story and when I describe it as literature, that is not to say that this is a work of fiction. The Bible never presents the book as a piece of fiction nor Job as a make-believe character.

The Scriptures include parables, which, by definition, are not historical events. They are not true but they teach a truth. But the book of Job does not read like a parable. The main character has a name...and a home: Job, from the land of Uz. The supporting cast of friends are named...and located. Chuck Swindoll calls Job's friends "the original Three Amigos". They are: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

While we cannot locate Uz, Teman, Shuah and Naamath with dogmatic specificity, we have some hints about where they were. And most of these places are referenced in other books of the Bible and in some literature outside of the Bible so we are safe in believing that these were real people who were from real places.

I believe it is important to know all of this because if Job was not a real person, his example is not worth much to us. But Job is a real person and his example is a witness to us.

Most people, when they think of Job, think of his patience. We get directed toward that trait by James 5:10-11. In the King James translation that most of us grew up with, we would have read:

¹⁰ Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. ¹¹ Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

And we HAVE heard of the patience of Job. But the characteristic of Job that I see most clearly in his biography is his faithfulness. Job was totally devoted to God in the good times and the bad times. He was totally devoted to God when people admired him and when they criticized him. Job was faithful to God.

If we are serious about stretching ourselves in our faithfulness, who would be a better role model than Job? Let's study his faithfulness.

I. **JOB WAS FAITHFUL IN THE MIDST OF AFFLUENCE**

I want you to notice first that Job was faithful in the midst of affluence. Job was a really wealthy man. Job 1:3 informs us that Job had 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys and a large number of servants. Job was rich!

And Job was blessed. He had 7 sons and 3 daughters. In an age when a man's social security was to have sons to tend his livestock and work his fields and daughters to look after him, Job was blessed with children to enjoy for now and a secure future to anticipate later.

Surrounded by such abundance, Job worshipped the Lord and was faithful to him. You, like Satan, may say, "Well, of course he worshipped God. Who wouldn't?"

But the truth is that sometimes it is difficult to remain faithful to the Lord when the blessings are rolling in. It is easy for our attention to be diverted from God when we have lots of material blessings. The Bible warns about this danger. In the book of Proverbs, chapter 30, verses 7 – 9, Solomon prayed:

⁷ *"Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die:*

⁸ *Keep falsehood and lies far from me;*

give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

⁹ *Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.*

As Larry Schnautz used to say, "That's good stuff!" That is a good prayer. "God, please don't give me either poverty or riches because both are dangerous. If I have too much, I might be inclined to say, 'Who is God? I did all of this with the sweat of my own brow and the work of my own hands.'"

I've known church members who have responded to success exactly like that. When they were struggling to make ends meet, they were faithful in their attendance at the services of the church. They were sacrificial in their giving to the church. They volunteered in the work of the church.

But then their business took off. They had more land they could farm, more overtime they could work, more customers to serve, more clients to maintain and more money to manage. I've actually had people tell me that God blessed them with so many opportunities that they couldn't possibly attend church regularly anymore. I've actually had people say that they had too much money to be able to tithe anymore. These were living breathing examples of what Proverbs 30 anticipated.

We ought not to be surprised. There were Biblical examples, too. Think of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel had warned the King about what was coming down the pike. He told Nebuchadnezzar that he was going to become cocky and try to

take credit for the blessings God had given him. Then, in Daniel 4, it happened just like Nebuchadnezzar had been warned.

²⁸ *All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”*

³¹ *The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. ³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”*

³³ *Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.*

Not everyone can be affluent and still put God first. But Job could. He was faithful to God even in the midst of affluence. And he was faithful to God even in the midst of affliction.

II. JOB WAS FAITHFUL IN THE MIDST OF AFFLICTION

You know Job’s story: he had it all and then he lost it all. Job 1:13-22 tells what happened.

¹³ *One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ 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!”*

¹⁶ *While he was still 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!”*

¹⁷ *While he was still 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!”*

¹⁸ *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, ¹⁹ 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!”*

²⁰ *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ 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.”

²²In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

It has been said that you can tell a lot about a man by what it takes to discourage him. I think it is also true that you can tell a lot about a person's faith by what it takes for him to abandon it. When Job 1:3 declared him to be the greatest man in the east, that was not just an evaluation of his material wealth, it was also an evaluation of his spiritual depth.

In one day, Job lost almost everything he had. His flocks and herds were rustled, his servants were murdered and his children died in a fierce windstorm. One by one, messengers came to tell him the bad news and each messenger's news was worse than the previous. Then his health broke and he was covered in painful boils and open sores.

One of the reasons I don't like to think too much about the patience of Job is because of the way he reacted to all of this. Job was not so laid back that he said, "Whatever". I guess that is what I would think a patient man might do. Job grieved and he mourned. He tore his robes and shaved his head as signs of his profound sorrow and then he fell to the ground...in worship!

When the man who had it all lost it all, his instinct was to worship God. He said that he hadn't brought anything into this world with him when he was born and he wasn't going to take anything with him when he died so everything he had was a blessing from God to use for just a while. If God wanted to take it away from him now, that was God's right...and he praised the Name of the LORD.

Some of you have experienced severe affliction and profound loss but you are here to worship the Lord anyway. That is commendable. That is as it ought to be.

But not everyone reacts to affliction in that way. When life gets hard, some people get hard. They turn against God and pout like petulant children to try to force the Lord to give them what they want. Most of us have known people who, because of some disappointment or hurt, have forsaken God, have left the church and have abandoned their faith. And they tell themselves they are justified because their hurt is so great.

That is why Job's example is so important...and why it is so important for us to remember he was a real person. None of us, none of our friends, none of our acquaintances have suffered like Job. And yet he was faithful to the Lord even in the midst of his affliction.

And Job was also faithful in the midst of accusation.

III. **JOB WAS FAITHFUL IN THE MIDST OF ACCUSATION**

I've already mentioned Job's three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. These are three true friends. When they heard of Job's compound tragedies, they came to him. When they arrived, they found him on the ash heap. That is, he was on the garbage dump outside the city wall. Here was a man who had sat at the city gate as the most prominent man in town and now he sat on the garbage dump outside of town, exiled like a leper or other outcast. What a comedown!

Notice what his three friends did. For seven days and seven nights they just sat with him and didn't say anything. These were prominent men from their own communities, too but they sat with Job in the squalor and gagged at the stench along with their friend. Like Job had done, they tore their fine robes as a sign of their grief because of their friend's adversity.

I am impressed that they didn't say anything. In the face of great loss, many of us are tempted to try to say something profound...or at least comforting. Let me give you a pretty simple idea: when you don't know what to say, don't say anything. Ordinary griefs can find vent in language. But exceptional griefs are too great for words. In those cases, your words are not enough and your presence is just enough.

Job's three friends were simply with him in his grief. And they were a comfort to him...until they opened their mouths and began to speak. Then they ruined it. They tried to explain the inexplicable. They tried to diagnose Job's problem that caused him to suffer so.

It is a natural tendency for us to try to make sense of suffering. We want to know the reason for tragedy because if there is, we can try to avoid it. But if there is no cause, we are vulnerable...we are susceptible...we are at risk. So Job's friends tried to find out what he did that brought on such suffering – and in the process they began to accuse him of having sinned against God.

With all that Job was enduring, he did not need the accusations of his friends. But he got them. And he didn't need his wife's advice that he stop clinging to his integrity and that he go ahead and curse God and die and get it over with.

But Job did not curse God just to get it over with. Nor did he give in to the pressure of his friends and agree that he had brought all of this on himself. He maintained that he had acted with integrity and he demonstrated that by maintaining his integrity toward God. This is, he remained faithful even in the midst of these accusations by his friends.

If you've ever been in that position where your best friends have become your sharpest accusers and they question your integrity, then you know the heartache they caused our friend Job. And yet he remained faithful.

CONCLUSION:

If you know the story of Job then you know the rest of the story. Having stood the test and having remained faithful no matter what, Job was rewarded by God. To replace the 7,000 sheep he had lost, God gave him 14,000. To replace the 3,000 camels he had lost, God gave him 6,000. To replace the 500 yoke of oxen and the 500 donkey God gave him 1,000 of each. And the 7 sons and 3 daughters? God gave him 7 more sons and 3 more daughters so that in his old age he would be cared for and in eternity he would enjoy the presence of twice as many children as he had before.

In his darkest hour, Job did not know that he was about to receive material restitution for all he had lost. But he had enough faith to realize that if he held onto his integrity, God would hold on to him. He sensed that if he was faithful to God, God would be faithful to him.

Whatever you are going through right now: a time of affluence, a time of affliction or a time of accusation - - no matter what, it is time to be faithful. That really is what we must learn from our old buddy, Job...we must learn to stretch our faithfulness so we will be fit for eternal life.

INVITATION: #517 – “I Will Sing of My Redeemer”